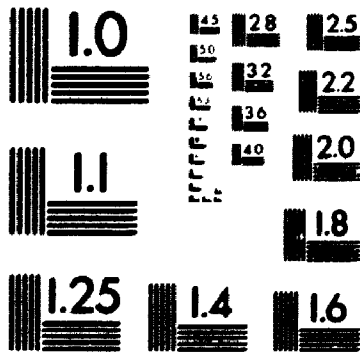


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**CONFLICT WITHIN THE UNION:
STRUGGLES AMONG SYDNEY STEEL WORKERS,
1936 - 1972**

by

RON CRAWLEY B.A., M.A., M.L.S

**A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of**

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Sociology and Anthropology

**Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario
January 26, 1995**

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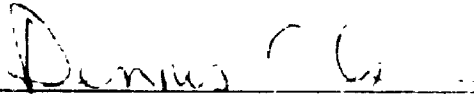
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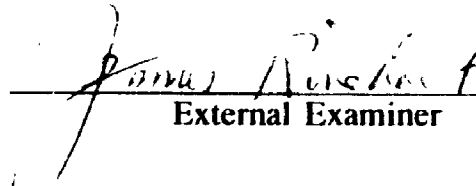
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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy



Chair, Department of Sociology and Anthropology



Thesis Supervisor (Dennis Olsen)



External Examiner

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ABSTRACT

The thesis addresses the importance of intra-union struggles as a mediating factor in understanding the relationship between changes in union policies and strategies and the larger socio-economic environment. Examination of these intra-union struggles, the thesis argues, is necessary for a fuller understanding of the development of the union and the steel workers' ongoing contestation with the steel company. It examines the significance of intra-union conflict in the establishment of "responsible" unionism and "industrial democracy" within the Canadian steel industry and in the context of international, national and local aspects of the union.

During the period 1936-1972 the steel workers were organized within Local 1064 of the United Steel Workers of America which, according to the findings of the thesis, was marked by intra-union conflict almost from its inception. Conflict between an establishment-dominated leadership and its supporters and oppositional forces, which took different forms and displayed various degrees of influence within the local over time, was an integral part of the union's political life. Arguments drawn from Marxist theory and from the work of Michels are compared and evaluated in light of the historical record of the steel workers and their attempts to build an effective organization.

The thesis demonstrates that oppositional activity within the union was crucial to understanding the development and direction of the union. The establishment and maintenance of "responsible" unionism and "industrial democracy" were mediated by

intra-union struggles. The findings of the study offer support for both a Marxist and a Michelsian theory of change within such organizations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first of all like to thank Dennis Olsen, Fred Caloren, Bruce MacFarlane and Del Muise. As members of my thesis committee they offered constructive criticism and encouragement during the research and writing of the dissertation. A special thanks to Dennis is in order, because as my supervisor he was always available for discussion, and his supportive but critical approach to my work greatly assisted me in focusing the thesis. The assistance of the support staff of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Carleton University is also greatly appreciated.

I would like to extend my gratitude to the staff of the Beaton Institute at the University College of Cape Breton, the National Archives of Canada and the Public Archives of Nova Scotia. I would also like to thank the National Office of the United Steel Workers of America (USWA) and Local 1064 of the USWA for permission to access the USWA material in the National Archives of Canada and the record of Local 1064 meetings. I also very much appreciate the cooperation of former steel workers who consented to be interviewed and whose insights greatly contributed to an understanding of the events which are analyzed in the thesis.

On a more personal note I must thank family and friends who encouraged and supported me in this work. First, there is my father Ron, who as a steel worker for more than 35 years, instilled in me an appreciation for the work done by steel workers. My mother Delores, now deceased, encouraged me most of all in my educational pursuits. She undoubtedly would have appreciated that I chose to involve myself so much in the study of the plant and its union, instead of having to earn a living in the plant as did her husband, her father and her grandfathers. Also, my uncle Terry, a steelworker for more than twenty years, constantly encouraged me to bring the thesis to completion.

I benefitted greatly from the suggestions of Michael Earle and Anthony Thomson who commented on an early draft of the thesis. Also, I would like to thank Joan and Jordan Bishop who urged me to see the project through. I want to especially acknowledge the endless encouragement provided by my long-time friends Herb and Ruth Gamberg. Ruth's editorial assistance was invaluable while Herb's willingness to always talk politics was stimulating and challenging.

Finally, and most importantly, I thank my partner Colleen, without whose love and support this thesis would not have been completed. Her confidence in my work helped me through a long and often lonely process.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACCL	All-Canadian Congress of Labour
AFL	American Federation of Labour
BESCO	British Empire Steel Company
CCF	Cooperative Commonwealth Federation
CCL	Canadian Congress of Labour
CIO	Committee of Industrial Organizations
CPC	Communist Party of Canada
CSU	Canadian Seamen's Union
CWS	Coordinated Wage Survey
DISCO	Dominion Iron and Steel Company
DOFASCO	Dominion Foundry and Steel Corporation
DOSCO	Dominion Steel Corporation
IRDIA	Industrial Relations and Disputes Investigation Act
LPP	Labour Progressive Party
MMWF	Maritime Marine Workers Federation
NAC	National Archives of Canada
PANS	Public Archives of Nova Scotia
SIU	Seamen's International Union
STELCO	Steel Company of Canada
SWOC	Steel Workers Organizing Committee
SYSCO	Sydney Steel Corporation
TLC	Trades and Labour Congress
UAW	United Auto Workers
UMWA	United Mine Workers of America
USWA	United Steel Workers of America
WUL	Workers Unity League

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In Canada, as in many other advanced capitalist societies, the primary organization of the working class is the trade union. It is the principal organization through which workers attempt to defend some of their basic interests by ameliorating the extent to which they are exploited by capitalists. In the post-World War II period trade unions emerged as stable organizations which played an important role in the economic and political life of the country. They even won a form of "industrial democracy" based on certain legal rights and the collective bargaining process.

Despite the stability and recognition achieved by unions through such historic change, their progress has been significantly restricted in the last two decades. The limitations of unions have become more evident as they have generally failed to protect past gains or win new concessions from capital and the state. Canadian trade unionism as a movement has failed to achieve many of the basic goals one might associate with it. It has not organized the majority of workers in the country. It has not instilled a militant trade union consciousness, not to speak of class consciousness, in significant sectors of the membership. It has also failed to develop a strategy or clear set of practices which allows for the building of solidarity among workers and the promotion of a working-class culture. It has not become the hegemonic movement of working and oppressed people in the sense that it leads and inspires other organizations and movements in the struggle against exploitation and oppression. In

summary, the inability of unions to defend the interests of their members and advance progressive social change has not only highlighted the economic and social crisis within Canada; it also has brought attention to what can only be regarded as a crisis within the union movement itself.

How do we explain this crisis, in historical as well as sociological terms? Undoubtedly working-class organizations such as unions are faced with formidable obstacles that are beyond their control. Contemporary capitalism is represented principally by huge corporations which command immense resources and have the flexibility, albeit limited, to terminate or initiate production and investment in virtually any part of the globe. Capitalists are aided in their quest for profit and accumulation by neo-conservative governments and the states which they lead.

The external obstacles facing unions make their failures understandable from a "common sense" point of view. This same perspective also has been strengthened and confirmed by a considerable body of academic research. However, I argue that the obvious strength and appeal of this explanation is inadequate for fully understanding the defeats and limitations of unions and the movement they represent. It is a compelling but incomplete explanation since it fails to take into account internal union dynamics, particularly the union's ability to resolve internal problems and marshal its forces. While it is widely acknowledged that working-class organizations often are divided along lines of gender, race, ethnicity, region and occupation,¹ their efforts to

¹ One of the distinctive features of Canadian unionism is based on the existence of Quebec and a distinct French culture in Canada. More than twenty five years ago John Porter argued that Quebec unionism was different from English Canadian unionism in

overcome and break down these divisions have received little attention. Such attempts, including the successful and unsuccessful ones, need to be explained, not ignored or taken as given. The thesis does not focus directly on these kinds of divisions, but it does analyze intra-union struggles that arise around competing union strategies and policies.

The inability of unions to mount effective resistance to "attacks" on their members by capital or the state has recently resulted in stronger calls from union activists for new strategies, determined action, and more progressive leadership. Within the Canadian Labour Congress these demands from activists resulted in the 1992 election of a new leadership which promised a new and more resolute approach to labour's problems. This change of leadership suggests that the present situation and future possibilities of unions are not based entirely on their "objective" situation and their measurable resources. Instead, the development and potential of unions must be understood in terms of a dialectical relationship between what sociologists refer to as structure and agency. A dialectical approach takes account of the tension between what particular actors strive for and what they achieve under conditions not of their own making. It argues for the possibility of real alternatives to what presently exists despite the constraints imposed by larger socio-economic conditions. These alternatives, which are often articulated and promoted by specific elements within the

a number of respects. See John Porter, The Vertical Mosaic: An Analysis of Social Power in Canada, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965, pp. 331-336, 361-365. For an evaluation of contemporary unionism in Quebec see Carla Lipsig-Mumme, "Future Conditional: Wars of Position in the Quebec Labour Movement", Studies in Political Economy, No. 36 (Autumn 1991) pp. 73-107.

union, can include a range of responses from militant or radical action to complete surrender and accommodation. Therefore, focusing on competing strategies and policies necessitates that we not only understand the larger terrain upon which unions function, but also that we view unions as **sites of struggle** where workers contend with each other in an attempt to develop and implement what they consider to be the most effective strategies and policies.

Generally speaking, such an approach has been lacking in the study of unionism, especially of unionism in the post World War II period. The studies of unions and workers' struggles in this period have concentrated on clashes between labour and capital, or the consequences for labour and unions of the new role played by the state. In particular, they have addressed the effects which the new institutional arrangements that are embedded in the industrial relations system and the welfare state have had in resolving or containing conflicts between labour and capital. What has been referred to in Canada as the post-war "compromise" or "accord" has been touted as a crucial development in the history of industrial relations and of class relations generally. Yet, there has been little investigation of precisely how this compromise between labour and capital was achieved in specific instances.

The thesis explores the compromise reached in the steel industry through an examination of the rise of "responsible" unionism and "industrial democracy" which supported it. In particular, it focuses on the Sydney steel workers' resistance to "responsible" unionism and the industrial compromise that supported it. In so doing, the study examines the various and often conflicting ways elements within the union

fought to win concessions from employers and the state. This expressed itself in intra-union conflict over particular strategies and policies.

The rise and persistence of oppositional forces within Local 1064 of the United Steel Workers of America² was related to the establishment of "industrial democracy" and the entrenchment of "responsible" unionism and the restrictions they placed on workers. The development of an opposition, and its specific form at a particular time, as well as its successes and failures, are also a focus of this study. With such an approach the study attempts to demonstrate the importance of intra-union struggles in understanding union development and class conflict. It also attempts to show their significance in assessing the limitations and potential of "responsible" unionism.

Chapter II briefly reviews the various theoretical perspectives on trade unions, including classical and contemporary approaches. It argues that whereas both classical Marxists and Michels paid great attention to conflicts within working-class organizations, contemporary analysts, including many who work within a Marxist paradigm, have largely ignored this issue.

Chapter III briefly outlines the major developments that have occurred within the North American labour movement in the post World War II period. It briefly discusses the "compromise" that was reached between capital and labour with the

² Local 1064 of the United Steel Workers of America (USWA) was established to represent the several thousand steel workers of Sydney, Nova Scotia. It was organized in 1936, just one year after the inception of the USWA in the United States. The Sydney industry has been a significant part of Canada's basic steel industry since the turn of the century and Sydney steel workers were therefore an important segment among Canadian steel workers.

assistance of the state. It notes that state intervention occurred on an industry-by-industry basis, unlike the corporatist approach taken by European social democratic regimes. It argues for the relevance and importance of the Sydney steel workers as a case study of intra-union conflict around the construction of what has been termed the "post-war compromise", and in particular the rise of "industrial democracy" and "responsible" unionism.

The fourth chapter discusses the founding years of Local 1064 and draws attention to the militant tradition among the Sydney steel workers and the crisis-ridden history of the industry. It analyses how this militancy clashed with the hierarchial brand of "responsible" unionism being advocated by the national and international leadership. Intra-union conflicts are posed largely, but not entirely, in terms of the struggle for local autonomy and militant unionism.

Chapter V focuses on the events surrounding the 1943 and 1946 strikes and how they essentially resulted in the winning of a restricted form of "industrial democracy". This compromise was seen as a defeat by the opposition forces and a victory by the established union leadership. The chapter also discusses the compromise between labour and capital in the steel industry and its linkage to the establishment of "responsible" unionism within the local.

Chapter VI provides evidence for the entrenchment of "responsible" unionism in the late 1940's at the expense of the opposition. It analyses a series of struggles that further fragmented the opposition movement and marginalized oppositional leaders. The continued post-war prosperity and the emerging anti-communist, cold-

war ideology are important parts of the context that makes this possible.

The seventh chapter analyses the circumstances under which the opposition was completely defeated in the early 1950's and was reconstituted in the late 1950's. The attack on oppositionists as communists and "irresponsible" unionists contributed greatly to their defeat in the early 1950's and their reconstitution as an eclectic and disorganized group in the late 1950's. "Responsible" unionists remained in control despite the developing economic crisis within the industry and the failure of the union to maintain basic wage parity with Ontario steel workers.

In chapter VIII the declining competitive position of the Sydney steel industry during the early 1960's is briefly discussed as a way of understanding the resurgence of oppositional activity that occurred in that period. The decline of the industry set the stage for a crisis within "responsible" unionism which was called into question by oppositional leaders. The electoral successes of the opposition are analyzed as are its limitations and the restrictions it faced.

The continuing problems within the Sydney steel industry in the late 1960's provide the context in which the opposition continued to challenge the union leadership. Chapter IX examines the passivity and ineffectiveness of the established leadership that contributed to the growing strength of the opposition and finally the election of a slate of oppositionists in 1970. This coincided with an upturn in the industry, which paved the way for the first plant-wide strike in twenty-five years.

The concluding chapter argues that the victory of the opposition did not represent an overthrowing of "responsible" unionism. Their objective was to build a

more militant and democratic union local that would more aggressively pursue the interests of the workers. However, their militancy and aggressiveness meant that they tested the limits of "responsible" unionism in a way which the established leaders and their supporters had not done. This was especially true when the employer, faced with industrial decline and the loss of the company's competitive position, undermined or attacked the basic gains and rights that had been won in the immediate post-war period. The erosion of the economic basis upon which industrial democracy and compromise was built, threatened the established relations between the employer and the workers. In effect, it threatened "responsible" unionism which had developed and become entrenched under industrial democracy. The activism and militancy of oppositional leaders and their supporters was both a protest against the limitations of such unionism and the leaders who upheld it, as well as a struggle against the company's assault on the gains they had made.

The ongoing erosion, if not complete collapse, of the compromise that was established in many other industries in post-war Canada, is presenting other workers with the same sorts of problems that were confronted by Sydney steel workers. This study suggests that the ability of workers in other industries to respond effectively to such situations will depend not just on the fortunes of their respective industries and whether they take a turn for the better or the worse. It will also depend on the ability of their unions, and in particular union leaders, to lead them effectively in confronting capital and the state. This study suggests that the impetus for renewal within the union movement will most likely come from oppositional elements who are dissatisfied with

the existing form of unionism and with those who practice and defend it.

CHAPTER II

THE PLACE OF INTRA-UNION CONFLICTS IN THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON TRADE UNION DEVELOPMENT

The issue of intra-union struggles has received a variety of responses within the theoretical and research literature on unionism. These have ranged from a singular focus on the issue to a virtual avoidance of the topic. Contemporary studies of intra-union conflicts in the social science literature are relatively few and represent somewhat of a departure from classical studies of unionism which paid considerable attention to the issue. This chapter outlines the various approaches to the study of unions and offers a critique of these perspectives.

A) Classical Perspectives on Trade Unions

i) Early Marxists

Karl Marx saw unions as very important in terms of their potential as schools of class struggle, but he also considered them to be quite limited under capitalism. "Trade unions work well as centres of resistance against the encroachments of capital," he wrote in 1865, but "they fail generally from limiting themselves to a guerilla war against the effects of the existing system,...instead of using their organized forces as a lever for the final emancipation of the working class."¹ Other classical Marxist thinkers such as Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg and Gramsci

¹ Karl Marx, Wages, Price and Profit, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1981, p. 55.

maintained this same basic position arguing that trade unions were organizations that came out of capitalism and to a large extent reflected class relations rather than being organizations which were committed to the elimination of such relations.

Trade unions were not expected, according to the early Marxists, to become vanguard organizations of the revolution. Nonetheless, they were criticized by them on other grounds. For Engels, the problem with the English trade unions was that they had become part of "an aristocracy among the working class."² Lenin adopted the concept of "labour aristocracy" from Engels and argued that its material basis was in imperialism, the monopoly stage of capitalism. He criticized what he saw as the opportunism of social democratic and trade union leaders within the labour aristocracy who were mired in economism.³ The economism of trade unions and their leaders was also a concern for Rosa Luxemburg since it separated the economic struggles of the working class from the political struggles. She criticized the "dark side of officialdom", which she saw as characterized by the bureaucratic and undemocratic practices of union officials as well as their overriding concern with organizational survival, industrial peace and personal careers.⁴ Trotsky also emphasized the importance of leadership and warned against the deliberate strategy by capital and the

² Frederick Engels, The Condition of the Working Class in England, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1973, pp. 33, 36.

³ V.I. Lenin, "What is to be Done", Collected Works, Vol. 5 (May 1901 - February 1902) 1961, pp. 349-529; "Left-Wing Communism - An Infantile Disorder" Collected Works Vol. 31 (April 1920 - December 1920) 1966, pp. 21-118.

⁴ Rosa Luxemburg, The Mass Strike: The Political Party and the Trade Unions, New York: 1971, pp. 79-80, 87-88.

state to emasculate unions and incorporate them into capitalism through the cooptation of union leaders. So successful was this strategy in Britain, according to Trotsky, that significant numbers of trade union leaders were already "the agents of large capital".⁵

Gramsci, whose work has become widely read and supported in contemporary scholarship, was also aware of the dangers of unions being completely integrated into capitalism. From a Gramscian perspective, unions could be viewed as one of the principal media through which the "consent" of the working class and the hegemony of the capitalist class are constructed and reproduced. Gramsci's insistence on "historical contingency", according to Richard Hyman, is one of his most important contributions to the theoretical understanding of trade unionism.⁶ Therefore, the terms and extent of accommodation were considered by him to be contingent on various factors. So, while trade unions are "the form which labour as a commodity is bound to assume in a capitalist system when it organizes itself in order to control the market," the particular form a union takes is not predetermined. Instead, "it takes on a definite historical form to the extent that the strength and will of the workers who are its members impress a policy and propose an aim that define it."⁷ Even under conditions of "industrial legality," which Gramsci saw as "a great victory for the working class, but ... not the ultimate and definite victory", unions could play very

⁵ Leon Trotsky, Where is Britain Going?, 1926, p. 146.

⁶ Richard Hyman, "The Sound of One Hand Clapping", International Review of Social History, Vol. XXXIV, 1989, p. 323.

⁷ Antonio Gramsci, "Unions and Councils", in Q. Hoare (ed.), Selections From the Political Writings, 1910-1920, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1977, p. 265.

different kinds of roles. Unions could even be a "tool of revolution" if:

the trade union officials regard industrial legality as a necessary, but not a permanently necessary compromise; if they deploy all the means at the union's disposal to improve the balance of forces in favour of the working class; and if they carry out the spiritual and material preparatory work that will be needed if the working class is to launch at any particular moment a victorious offensive against capital and subject it to its law.⁸

Unfortunately, in Gramsci's view, trade union leaders usually functioned to maintain capitalist hegemony by organizing the consent of workers.⁹

Despite their different emphases, it is clear that the early Marxists were very much aware of the limitations which capitalism imposed on trade unions and the influence it exercised in shaping them. They were also very much concerned with the struggles within unions themselves and the importance of such conflicts in influencing union responses to capital. In particular, they emphasized the importance of class-conscious and revolutionary leadership as a guard against the tendency of unions to become increasingly incorporated and integrated into capitalism. However, while the early Marxists argued that conservative or opportunist leadership could frustrate and retard the potential of working-class organizations, for the most part they placed little emphasis on the way in which such organizations and institutions sometimes changed even revolutionary leadership into conservative and undemocratic officials. This problem was to be systematically addressed by the ex-Marxist, Robert Michels.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 265-66.

⁹ Frank R. Annunziato, "Gramsci's Theory of Trade Unionism" Rethinking Marxism, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Summer 1988) p. 163.

ii) Michels

While the historically contingent approach of the early Marxists allowed them to maintain a somewhat optimistic outlook about the potential of working-class organizations to remain democratic and serve the interests of their members, Robert Michels' perspective offered an entirely pessimistic view of that potential. He argued that the tendency towards oligarchy and undemocratic practices was inherent within organization itself.¹⁰ He based his theory on the claim that the masses of workers are technically incapable of maintaining working-class organizations as viable entities and therefore need expert leadership.¹¹ The technical and practical necessity of expert leadership and organization tends to result in the development of oligarchical and bureaucratic organizations, even when an organization is a radical one in its initial stage. Therefore, according to Michels, the tendency towards oligarchy and bureaucracy "is the inevitable product of the very principle of organization."¹²

According to Michels the oligarchical and bureaucratic tendency of organizations such as unions and political parties results in the creation of "an elite of the working class" and the division of the organization into "a minority of directors and a majority of the directed."¹³ He even asserted that, "In the trade union, it is even easier than in the political labor organization, for the officials to initiate and

¹⁰ Robert Michels, Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy, New York: The Free Press, 1962, p. 70.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 70.

¹² Ibid., p. 72.

¹³ Ibid., p.70.

pursue a course of action disapproved of by the majority of workers they are supposed to represent".¹⁴ Michels acknowledged variations in the extent of the problem based on the size of organization: "The more extended and the more ramified the official apparatus of the organization, the greater the number of its members, the fuller its treasury, and the more widely circulated its press, the less efficient becomes the direct control exercised by the rank and file."¹⁵

Furthermore, attempts by the masses to replace dictatorial and oligarchical leaders with truly democratic ones are futile, according to Michels. The control of the organization's finances and communications network, including the press, makes the leaders' replacement very unlikely. The replacement of leadership also becomes increasingly difficult with longer tenure in office.¹⁶ Michels acknowledged rank-and-file rebellions against leadership, but asserted that they were rarely successful. One of the problems is that the power and influence of the leaders "become more fascinating to the masses, stimulating the ambition of all the more talented elements to enter the privileged bureaucracy of the labour movement". This cooptation of sorts results in the rank and file becoming "more impotent to provide new and intelligent forces capable of leading the opposition which may be latent among the masses."¹⁷

Michels was quite sympathetic to Pareto's notion of the circulation of elites.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 159.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 71.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 120-21.

¹⁷ Ibid., p.170.

but he qualified his acceptance of this view by arguing that "there is not a simple replacement of one group of elites by another, but a continuous process of intermixture, the old elements incessantly attracting, absorbing, and assimilating the new."¹⁸ Where there is intense rivalry between "cliques", according to Michels, it eventually "ends in a reconciliation which is effected with the instinctive aim of retaining dominion over the masses by sharing it among themselves."¹⁹ He suggests that like the previous leaders, the new leaders eventually accommodate to the existing order and become completely reconciled to it.²⁰

Michels identified real concrete problems facing nominally democratic organizations, but his explanation of them has been strongly criticized. Michels' theory is problematic, according to Hyman, because it is not rooted in an historical understanding of the diversity among such organizations and how they continue to change over time.²¹ In a similar vein, Irving Zeitlin criticizes Michels for not heeding Marx's warning that what may appear as a law under certain conditions must not be considered a law under all circumstances.²² Michels also errs, according to Zeitlin, inasmuch as he employs the concepts of oligarchy and leadership as if they

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 343.

¹⁹ Ibid., p.343.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 283.

²¹ Richard Hyman, Marxism and the Sociology of Trade Unions, London: Pluto Press, 1971, p. 36.

²² Irving M. Zeitlin, "Robert Michels", in Ideology and the Development of Sociological Theory, Englewood Cliff, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1968, p. 221.

were necessarily synonymous and interchangeable.²³ Seymour Martin Lipset also acknowledges this weakness in Michels' view which sees "any separation between leaders and followers as *ipso facto* a negation of democracy."²⁴ Therefore, Michels never allows for distinctions between types of leadership in terms of how well they serve the membership and how they attempt to involve it in solving the very problems which Michels identifies.

Michels concept of the "iron law of oligarchy" is overstated, according to Alvin Gouldner, because of the persistent opposition to oligarchy that is implicit even in Michels statement of the problem. According to Gouldner, one could claim that there is an "iron law of democracy" since, "if oligarchical waves repeatedly wash away the bridges of democracy, this eternal recurrence can happen only because men [sic] doggedly rebuild them after each inundation." Michels, according to Gouldner, "chose to dwell on only one aspect of this process, neglecting to consider this other side."²⁵ This dissertation speaks to these two opposing tendencies through an analysis of intra-union conflicts.

It is also important to note, according to Lipset, that while Michels, unlike the early Marxists, remained pessimistic about organizational leadership, he shared a

²³ Ibid., p. 227.

²⁴ Seymour Martin Lipset, "Introduction", in Robert Michels, Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy, New York: The Free Press, 1962. p. 34.

²⁵ A. W. Gouldner, "Metaphysical Pathos and the Theory of Bureaucracy", in L. A. Coser and B. Rosenberg (eds.), Sociological Theory: A Book of Readings 3rd Edition. London: Macmillan, 1969. p. 492.

materialist conception of history with them based on a logic of self-interest and exploitation of a minority by a majority.²⁶ Michels expressed his partial agreement with marxism by stating, "There is no essential contradiction between the doctrine that history is the record of a continued series of class struggles and the doctrine that class struggles invariably culminate in the creation of new oligarchies which undergo fusion with the old."²⁷ The essential problem with Michels' approach, from a Marxist perspective, is that working-class organizational developments are explained entirely in terms of the functions of the organizations themselves and the interests and ambitions of the leadership, without seeing them as linked to a larger social and political environment. Nonetheless, both the classical Marxists and Michels saw working-class organizations as worthy of study and criticism with respect to their internal relations of power and the impact they could have in terms of resisting capital and the state. It is this question that is addressed in the present study.

B) Contemporary Approaches

i) Non-Marxists

The period during and immediately after World War II saw the widespread recognition and acceptance of unions by capital under the auspices of the state. A body of scholarly literature was produced which devoted itself to analyzing the impact of these changes on trade unions in North America. Some of these ignored or

²⁶ Ibid., p. 35.

²⁷ Robert Michels, 1962, op. cit., p. 354.

dismissed concerns about union democracy that were central to Michels' work. Golden and Rutenburg, in their classic statement on the newly emerging "industrial democracy" in the United States, emphasized the importance of leadership in organization and promoted the view that properly trained leaders could "assume and discharge their responsibilities to the best interests of both their members and the business enterprise upon which they depend for a livelihood."²⁸ The emphasis on organizational processes is also evident in the work of Richard Lester who saw the changes within unions as part of a natural "maturing" process which involved the shedding of their "youthful characteristics". This process was marked by a move away from internal factionalism, militancy and missionary zeal, towards greater union discipline, cooperation and pragmatism. This transformation, according to Lester, occurred at different speeds and times depending on the union, but was nonetheless inevitable.²⁹

These studies suggested that organizational changes in unions were important in harmonizing, to some extent, the goals and interests of employers and workers. Others maintained a Michelsian-like focus on organizational changes and their effects on democracy. One of the classic trade union studies that was inspired by Michels'

²⁸ C.S. Golden and H.J. Rutenburg, The Dynamics of Industrial Democracy, New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1942, pp. 61-2. Golden and Rutenburg were more than ideologists for "industrial democracy". They worked with the Steel Workers Organizing Committee (SWOC) and its successor, the United Steelworkers of America (USWA), to help train their organizing staff to become "contract administrators". See p. 64.

²⁹ R. A. Lester, As Unions Mature: An Analysis of the Evolution of American Unionism, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958.

work was that of Lipset, Trow and Coleman. Based on research and analysis of politics within the International Typographical Union (ITU), they qualified Michels' theory by arguing that union democracy could be preserved in smaller and more autonomous unions where the membership is more educated and has informal ties among individuals. The array of organizational and membership characteristics was considered unusual enough by them that they stressed that the two-party system of government in the ITU was a "deviant" form of union government.³⁰

Like Michels' work, these studies do not adequately acknowledge how factors "external" to the union affect internal developments and how internal processes and union structure influence the ability of unions to respond to capital. Especially problematic is the lack of attention to changing class dynamics which, according to Lichtenstein, "ultimately led to a static ahistorical approach to trade unions and working-class history and a fundamentally pessimistic appraisal of the possibility of democratic social change."³¹

C. Wright Mills, in his critical study of union leadership in the post-war United States, moved in the direction of analyzing the relationship between unions and the larger society by looking at the changing role and position of union leaders. "Responsible" labour leaders, he observed, speak "the rhetoric of liberalism" and the language of cooperation, which they share with business, political and scholarly

³⁰ Seymour Martin Lipset, M.A. Trow and J.S. Coleman, Union Democracy: The Internal Politics of the International Typographical Union, New York: 1956.

³¹ Nelson Lichtenstein, Labour's War at Home: The CIO in World War II, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982, p. 2.

leaders.³² Mills saw union leaders' search for safety in legal and institutional guarantees as problematic since it meant that leaders tend to look to government rather than to the workers for solutions to the attacks by capital. Even then they confine themselves to "a sequence of excited or bored demands on current legislators, or a defense against specific bills and items the other side may propose" instead of a far-sighted program.³³ When union leaders do become involved in strikes or organizational campaigns they in effect become "managers of discontent" rather than work towards the enlightenment and greater participation of workers in economic and political affairs.³⁴

Mills' analysis is an important contribution in that it offers critical insights into the dominant ideology and practices of union officials and their relationship to the dominant societal elites and their ideology. Unfortunately, there is no systematic analysis of union struggles and their connection to the larger political economy. This has produced, as in Michels' work, a view of a strangely silent membership and an essentially pessimistic view about the possibility of basic progressive change within unions and the establishment of a more equal relationship between workers and employers.

³² C. Wright Mills, The New Men of Power: America's Labour Leaders, New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1948, p. 111.

³³ Ibid., p. 160.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 9.

ii) Neo-Marxist Approaches

The dramatic growth of Marxist scholarship from the late 1960's to the present has produced a significant body of literature which embedded trade union developments in an understanding of the changes occurring within capitalism. While most scholars working in a Marxist tradition viewed bureaucratic and undemocratic internal union relations as the "natural" outgrowth of industrial legality and a bureaucratic industrial relations system, others emphasized that it was the result of the active promotion of such a relationship by capital and the collaboration of union leaders in this goal. The latter position is held by Ernest Mandel, among others. He argues that the present arrangement is not "a passive reflection of the evolution of the relationship of social forces," but a "tactical aim of capitalists" to involve trade unions and working-class representatives in "a daily practice of class collaboration."³⁵

Much of contemporary Marxist scholarship has rejected this viewpoint and has attempted to account for changes within unionism from the perspective of the increased role of the state and the institutional arrangements which were consolidated in the post-World War II period. Stanley Aronowitz argued that the reliance on the law and regulations regarding union-employer relations determined to a large extent who made decisions in unions. Because legal strategies necessitate significant input from lawyers, researchers, and consultants with special knowledge or skills, such experts tend to function as buffers between the rank and file and the leadership. The

³⁵ Ernest Mandel, "The Debate on Workers' Control" in G. Hunnius, G.D. Garson and J. Case, eds., Workers' Control: A Reader on Labour and Social Change. New York: Random, 1973. p. 352.

rank and file sometimes maintains veto power over the decisions of such functionaries, but it has few means of initiating changes. The emphasis on legal strategies and what could be "negotiated", according to Aronowitz, also changed the labour leaders' agenda if not that of the membership. Shifts in plant location, work methods, job definitions and other problems associated with investment in equipment, expansion and changing requirements of skill were usually ignored or badly handled by national and regional leadership who sought mostly monetary gains and often had to be forced by the members to fight employers on many of the "local" issues.³⁶

Other left-wing scholars have also distanced themselves from the view that the major impediment to union progress is leadership collaboration, but some of them have acknowledged the importance of leadership/rank-and-file relations. For instance, Michael Goldfield stresses that the acceptance of unions by capital in the post-war period required that "union leaders faithfully fulfil their roles in containing, frustrating, and disciplining working class struggle."³⁷ Kim Moody also stresses the importance of bureaucratization and the role of union leaders in this process. He argues that "Far from being the structural and temporal consequence of the stabilization of the bargaining process," bureaucratization "was its necessary precondition".³⁸ Once in place, the rigidity of the collective bargaining process

³⁶ Stanley Aronowitz, False Promises: The Shaping of the American Working Class Consciousness, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973, p. 221-223.

³⁷ Michael Goldfield, The Decline of Organized Labour in the United States, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987, p. 71.

³⁸ Kim Moody, An Injury to All: The Decline of American Unionism, London: Verso, 1988, p. 29.

became a problem, according to Lichtenstein, because it "thwarted the emergence of an independent cadre that could give continuous leadership to the episodic conflict that still unfolded in the workplace."³⁹

Bureaucratic and conservative leadership also played a role in undermining what Fantasia calls a "culture of solidarity" which was still very much alive in the 1930's. This culture was based on "an ability and willingness to rely on workers' solidarity as the prime source of their power" as expressed in sympathetic strikes, wildcat strikes, political strikes as well as other forms of work-place action.⁴⁰ The elimination or restriction of these practices, according to Fantasia, have to be understood in terms of attempts by capital to limit workers' power; but, a necessary condition for the decline of militant action was, "a rigidly hierarchical, bureaucratic union leadership, schooled in the pragmatic ethos of the social contract."⁴¹

The differing emphases of various Marxist scholars suggest a real tension between structural forces and internal union relations as explanatory variables in understanding the development of contemporary unionism. The dominant trend within neo-Marxism is to emphasize the external obstacles facing unions, that is, factors such as restrictive legislation or institutional arrangements, the strength and mobility of capital, or the crisis of the "Fordist" regime of accumulation. This represents something of a departure from early Marxists such as Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg and

³⁹ Nelson Lichtenstein, 1982, *op. cit.*, p. 244.

⁴⁰ Rick Fantasia, Cultures of Solidarity: Consciousness, Action, and Contemporary American Workers, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988, p. 240.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 71.

Gramsci who placed great emphasis on leadership/rank-and-file relations and working-class consciousness as important to understanding and overcoming the obstacles facing unions and the working class in general. In addition, the emphasis of the neo-Marxists also ignores the Michelsian concern with organizational and institutional processes which again placed leadership/rank-and-file relations at the centre of the debate about the shortcomings of unions and other working-class organizations.

The differences among radical theorists remain unresolved as do the questions they raise about the crisis within contemporary unionism. However, this tension and various efforts to resolve it have produced some original approaches to the problem. One of these, which appears to draw on both Weberian and Marxist theory, is put forward by Claus Offe. Unions, according to Offe, are faced with an essential dilemma brought on by increasing bureaucratization and heterogeneity as they increase in size and resources. As resources increase, the ability to mobilize the membership becomes restricted because of the occupational differences and communication problems among the membership and the bureaucracy required to administer union affairs.⁴²

The dilemma develops in what Offe calls "Stage II" (the second of five stages) of union development. This is the point at which unions are strong enough that their effective use of power is seen as plausible by capital. Capital often meets the demands of labour so as to avoid strikes. The union is strong, but contextual conditions do not

⁴² Claus Offe, "Two Logics of Collective Action", in Disorganized Capitalism, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1985, pp. 186-87.

allow it to revert to militant confrontation as in "Stage I" and still survive.⁴³ The only option, according to Offe, is to move to the "opportunist" strategy of "Stage III", where internal mobilization is replaced by reliance on external guarantees provided by the state. Its bargaining position becomes "institutionalized and sanctioned by legal statutes" but "the internal structure of the organization will be transformed into one that maximizes the independence of the organization's functionaries from the collective expression of will and activity of its members."⁴⁴ The instability of this solution becomes clear, according to Offe, in "Stage IV" when under conditions of economic decline, external state supports are withdrawn and the union is too weak to effectively resist such measures. This necessitates a move to "Stage V," which is a return to a type of militant collective action as in "Stage I." This stage is different from the first, however, in that it is likely led by a "faction" and it "tends to focus on a much broader range of political, legal, and institutional arrangements."⁴⁵

The strength of Offe's approach is that it relates internal union dynamics to external factors. However, the way in which it does so is problematic. Offe's assumption that bureaucracy and heterogeneity become problematic for unions as they grow and develop is generalized to all unions without stressing that the degree of bureaucracy and heterogeneity can vary from union to union as can the level of

⁴³ Ibid., p. 216.

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 216-17.

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 218-20.

awareness and active engagement in resolving such problems. Also, although he deals with these factors as obstacles to mobilization, he does not explore the intra-union political struggles that arise from these problems. For instance, he does not take into account the struggles within unions or within the union movement which would elaborate the case for and against reliance on external agencies such as the state. He also does not clearly identify the forces he thinks would most likely promote or discourage a regeneration of unionism and a return to a "Stage I" type of militant grassroots unionism except to say that it would probably be based in or led by a "faction". He also suggests that the stages of union development he has outlined inevitably occur and are part of a circular kind of process, rather than being at least partly contingent on the outcome of struggles within unions. The present study examines the contradictory way in which external threats or problems are responded to within the steel workers' union. As the dissertation shows, there is seldom only one response to such threats and the contradictory responses are part of larger intra-union conflicts.

Nonetheless, Offe's attempt to resolve contradictions within contemporary Marxism's treatment of unions by linking internal union developments to those in the larger political economy is important. While not adopting Offe's model, this study explores the tensions between the limits placed on working-class organizations by societal structures and processes and the efforts of workers to resist and change these structures and processes. It is also concerned with workers' attempts to change the unions themselves. This is done by analyzing intra-union struggles within the steel

workers' union in the context of conflicts between the steel workers and the employer and the state.

C) Factionalism Versus Rank-and-File Approaches to Intra-Union Conflicts

Within radical scholarship, the sub-discipline which has most consistently dealt with the internal dynamics of unions has been the relatively new field of labour or working-class history. While Offe and others have examined the broad contours of contemporary unionism, labour and working-class historians have analyzed the internal politics and dynamics of unionism through an historical examination of particular unions. A debate arising from such investigation in the British context has revolved around the issue of the appropriateness of using the terms "rank-and-file" and "factions" as conceptualizations to explain intra-union conflicts.

The "rank-and-filist" perspective, according to Jonathan Zeitlin, sees fundamental difference between the interests and activities of the ordinary membership and the union leadership. The rank and file are seen to rebel against trade union structures and their leaders who attempt to contain their struggles within limits imposed by the industrial relations system.⁴⁶ However, several problems associated with this approach, according to Zeitlin, make it an unworkable explanatory model. First, it is difficult to identify who exactly belongs to the "bureaucracy" and who to the "rank and file". Where exactly do elected local officials such as shop stewards or

⁴⁶ Jonathan Zeitlin, "'Rank and Filism' in British Labour History: A Critique", International Review of Social History, Vol. XXXIV, 1989, pp. 45-47.

departmental union representatives fit? Historically, they have sided with national union officers on some issues while supporting or leading rank-and-file opposition to union headquarters at other times. A related criticism of the rank-and-file perspective is that intra-union conflicts are often between factions of workers led by rival groups of leaders. Furthermore, union officials have sometimes shown themselves to be more militant or radical than the majority of workers and as vitally concerned about job control issues as with strictly economic issues. Finally, the perception of union bureaucrats as undemocratic may be undermined by their responsiveness to membership demands.⁴⁷

In response to Zeitlin, Richard Price has argued that while the term "rank and file" is not without its problems, it may better speak to some tensions within unions than does the term "faction". Firstly, below the level of organized leadership groups there can be a large diversity of views and actions among the membership which speaks to relations between officials and members and cannot be neatly placed into factions. The membership or sections of it do sometimes act spontaneously and without the intervention of official leaders; this certainly leaves room for the idea of "rank-and-file".⁴⁸ Secondly, leadership authority "is not something that flows from the unimpeded democratic mandate of the membership," and rank-and-file interpretations draw attention to the problem of the way in which leadership deals

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 59-60.

⁴⁸ Richard Price, "'What's in a Name?' Workplace History and 'Rank and Filism'", International Review of Social History, Vol. XXXIV, 1989, pp. 70-73.

with membership demands.⁴⁹

Richard Hyman, one of the few sociologists to participate in this debate, also sees the term "rank and file" as an inadequate conceptualization since it suggests a lack of differentiation among the membership in terms of their interest or hierarchical control.⁵⁰ Also, between the ordinary member and the top union officials there exists a stratum of stewards and lay officers which Hyman refers to as a "semi-bureaucracy"; this stratum mediates relations between the two.⁵¹ Nonetheless, he insists that in certain circumstances, such as those where rank-and-file militancy opposes moderate union leadership, the rank-and-file perspective is a legitimate one.⁵²

Hyman is also critical of the term "union bureaucracy" since it is used as a derogatory slogan or descriptive category rather than as an analytical concept. However, he maintains that the critique of union bureaucracy reflects a genuine and important problem within trade unionism. It is that "those continuously engaged in a representative capacity perform a crucial mediating role in sustaining tendencies towards an accommodative and subaltern relationship with external agencies

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 70.

⁵⁰ Richard Hyman, "The Politics of Workplace Trade Unionism: Recent Tendencies and Some Problems for Theory", Capital and Class, Vol. 8 (Summer), 1979, p. 55.

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 60-1.

⁵² Richard Hyman, The Political Economy of Industrial Relations: Theory and Practice in a Cold Climate, London: The Macmillan Press, 1989, p. 325.

(employers and state) in opposition to which trade unions were originally formed."⁵³

While some form of accommodation is necessary, short of a revolutionary situation, the problem is that "those within unions who primarily conduct external relations do not merely react to irresistible pressure; they help shape and channel the nature and extent to which trade union goals and methods adapt to external agencies which seek to minimise the disruptive impact of workers' collective resistance to capital."⁵⁴

There are three powerful but not irresistible tendencies, according to Hyman, which help explain why union officials often play a conservative role, especially in times of membership activism and struggle. First, union officials "possess a direct responsibility for their organisations' security and survival," which encourages a cautious approach to policy. Secondly, because of their ongoing relationship with external parties, they normally become committed to preserving a stable bargaining relationship and operating according to "the rules of the game." Thirdly, the rationale for their positions is usually a competence to perform specialist functions rather than an emphasis on the importance of militant mass action.⁵⁵ Two other factors deserving of mention are that union leaders, especially at the national and international levels, do not experience daily exploitation at the workplace as do rank-and-file members, and they generally enjoy a significantly higher standard of living than ordinary union members. However, according to Hyman, these tendencies do not

⁵³ Richard Hyman, 1979, op. cit. pp. 54-55.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 55.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 55.

amount to an "iron law of oligarchy", as suggested by Michels. "No trade union movement can become wholly an agency of repressive discipline," Hyman argues, "for this would destroy its pretensions to independence and thus its claims to workers' loyalty to the instructions and recommendations which it issues."⁵⁶ This dissertation indicates that the checks against oligarchy or accommodation are stronger or weaker at various historical moments. The counter-tendency to these conservative forces can be gauged by the extent and nature of oppositional forces within a particular union, including their organization and activities.

The examination of factionalism and rank-and-file rebellion in the context of class conflict by historians of the working class has contributed to our understanding of internal union relations and intra-union conflicts. But their work, for the most part, has not dealt with unions in the post-war period and has raised more questions than answers about the nature and significance of intra-union struggles and their impact on class conflict. The purpose of this dissertation is to explore these issues further in the context of post-war developments and in particular to examine the importance of the various forms of intra-union conflict among the Sydney steel workers.

D) Intra-Union Conflicts and Issues of Democracy

The concerns about the importance of intra-union struggles obviously raise questions about the nature of union democracy generally and union decision-making processes specifically. However, this study is not especially concerned with union

⁵⁶ Ibid. p. 60.

democracy. Instead, I am interested in it in so far as it affects the ability of union members to promote and choose particular strategies over others. As Hyman has argued, union democracy acquires significance only in the context of struggles to advance the interests of workers.⁵⁷ There is, according to Lipset, Trow and Coleman, a relationship between the nature and extent of democracy and the type of unionism practised. They have argued that the dominant conception of unionism and union leadership "as simply the administration of an organization with defined, undebatable goals" historically has helped legitimate undemocratic and conservative practices.⁵⁸ Linda Briskin contends that the treatment of union members principally as consumers to be "serviced" by business agents and other union officials is most common. Instead of advocating greater participatory democracy many unions rely on a less empowering representative form of democracy.⁵⁹

The most important aspect of democracy within unions as it relates to this study is the issue of minority rights. This involves the right of individuals and groups of workers to challenge union leaders, including the right to form opposition groups. It also includes the right to have minority group interests represented and incorporated within the union to some extent. In effect, it refers to the usual civil rights and liberties adhered to in liberal democratic society. Looking at the American

⁵⁷ Richard Hyman, 1989, op. cit., pp. 159-60.

⁵⁸ Seymour Martin Lipset, M.A. Trow and J.S. Coleman, 1956, op. cit., pp. 405-410.

⁵⁹ Linda Briskin, "Women, Unions and Leadership", Canadian Dimension, Vol. 24, No. 1 (January-February), 1990, p. 39.

experience, Herman Benson stresses that union democracy was kept alive by oppositional forces such as "temporary caucuses, oppositional currents, and dissident slates of candidates that come forward from time to time in response to some immediate need." Furthermore, according to Benson, "The health of union democracy requires the creation and defense of those conditions within unions which permit such leavening minority groups to arise when necessary, to continue to function, and to even disappear without a forced suppression."⁶⁰

The most important factor in promoting and maintaining such democracy, according to Edelstein and Warner, is the existence of union organizational structures that facilitate democratic participation.⁶¹ On the other hand, Roderick Martin does not see "formal organization" as an independent variable which explains democracy, but instead, as a dependent one reflecting the union's history, membership, and bargaining position, among other factors. These constraints are classified by Martin into twelve categories ranging from political culture and industrial setting to leadership and membership beliefs.⁶² In effect, oppositional forces can be seen as

⁶⁰ H.W. Benson, "The Fight for Union Democracy", in S.M. Lipset, ed., Unions in Transition: Entering the Second Century, San Francisco: Institute for Contemporary Studies, 1986, p. 368.

⁶¹ J.D. Edelstein, "An Organizational Theory of Union Democracy", American Sociological Review, Vol. 32, No. 1 (February), 1967; J.D. Edelstein and M. Warner, Comparative Union Democracy: Organization and Opposition in British and American Unions, London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1975, p. 29.

⁶² Roderick Martin, "Union Democracy: An Explanatory Framework", Sociology, Vol. 2, No. 2 (May), 1968, p. 208. Other studies suggest that additional factors correlating with union democracy are union size, spatial concentration of members, personal relationships among workers, and identification with the larger working population, among others. See William A. Faunce, "Size of Locals and Union

partly the products of democracy as well as the agents of democratic change. They are also the products and agents of union strategies and policies, as well as the larger societal forces that discourage or promote them.

E) Conclusion

Most recent North American studies of unions have paid little attention to internal union dynamics and how they relate to larger external developments. While research on unions in the post World War II period has contributed to our understanding of the general role played by unions in society and the role of the industrial relations system, it has largely ignored intra-union conflicts and their relationship to the goals and strategies of unions. One reason for this is suggested by Benson who argued that the issue of democracy had been largely ignored by a generation of American "labor intellectuals" because there had been a "bureaucratization of research and writing." The bureaucratization was based on the relationship of such intellectuals to labour leaders and the industrial relations process where they served as experts and advisors. A common rationalization for the avoidance of this problem by them is the view that the union membership is apathetic

Democracy." American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 68, No. 3, (November), 1962, pp. 291-298; Edna E. Raphael, "Power Structure and Membership Dispersion in Unions," American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 71, No. 3 (November) 1965, pp. 274-283; and William Spinrad, "Correlates of Trade Union Participation: A Summary of the Literature". American Sociological Review, Vol. 25, No. 2 (April) 1960, pp. 237-244.

about such issues and more interested in concrete material gains.⁶³

The paucity of studies on internal power relations within unions points up the need for further empirical and theoretical work in this area. This dissertation attempts to make a contribution to filling this void by examining intra-union struggles and class conflict within the Canadian steel industry with a focus on local 1064 of the United Steel Workers of America and the Sydney steel workers in the period 1936 to 1972. The period under study is chosen because it encompasses the three and a half decades when unions, including the steel workers' union, appeared to make their most impressive gains. Yet, as this dissertation suggests, and the case of the steel workers demonstrates, the relative stability of unions was nonetheless accompanied by ongoing and sometimes fierce intra-union conflicts.

⁶³ H.W. Benson, "Apathy and Other Axioms: Expelling the Union Dissenter from History", Dissent, (Winter) 1972, pp. 211-24. Esther Reiter has suggested that the same kind of relationship between intellectuals and labour leaders persists in Canada and is partially responsible for the lack of useful and relevant research on unions from the rank-and-file member's perspective. Ester Reiter, "The Price of Legitimacy: Academics and the Labour Movement", in W.K. Carroll et al. (eds.), Fragile Truths: 25 Years of Sociology and Anthropology in Canada, Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1992, pp. 356-57.

CHAPTER III

POST-WAR UNION DEVELOPMENTS IN CANADA

A) Canadian Unions in the Post-War Period

In the five decades prior to World War II, Canadian workers organized themselves against employers who used both paternalistic and coercive means to maximize exploitation and profits. In their attempt to build unions, they waged bitter strikes, which often polarized communities and sometimes involved armed intervention by the state.¹ The workers' movement also built various kinds of political organizations and embraced different ideologies in the early part of the century. According to Bryan Palmer, the working-class movement was "infused with socialist principle and rhetoric" and in which "Labourite and socialist, syndicalist and revolutionary, Christian moralist and pragmatic unionist were all drawn into labour's struggles". Even after the defeats suffered by the labour movement in 1919 and the early 1920's communism, social democracy and labourism continued as competing currents within the workers' movement.² These political currents informed trade union practices and policies and were reflected in the emergence of numerous independent unions as well as those affiliated to labour centrals such as the All Canadian Confederation of Labour (ACCL), the Canadian Congress of Labour

¹ Craig Heron, The Canadian Labour Movement: A Short History, Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1989.

² Bryan Palmer, Working Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800-1991, 2nd Edition, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Inc., 1992, p. 211.

(CCL), the communist-led Workers Unity League (WUL) and the craft dominated Trades and Labour Congress (TLC).³

Trade union developments in Canada also closely paralleled those of the United States in some respects. This was due in large part to the penetration of United States-based corporations into the Canadian economy along with American-based unions that attempted to organize sectors of the Canadian workforce. The influence of American-based unionism reached unprecedented levels after 1936 when the Committee of Industrial Organizations (CIO) was formed by the United Mine Workers and other industrial unions which were disgruntled with the craft-dominated American Federation of Labour (AFL). The CIO promised to organize all industrial workers, and soon after its inception, it began a massive campaign to organize the mass production industries in both Canada and the United States.

In many cases, CIO leaders initially relied on already existing rank-and-file movements and local independent unions led by militant workers. However, once the union was successfully established, the CIO leadership usually advocated a more bureaucratic and less militant type of unionism, which was resisted by many rank-and-file workers.⁴ As it achieved greater success, the unionism of the CIO became a new version of business unionism, according to Kim Moody. It came to have the same essential thrust as unionism "pure and simple" in that it left capital's dominance

³ Irving M. Abella, Nationalism, Communism and Canadian Labour: The CIO, the Communist Party, and the Canadian Congress of Labour, 1935-1956, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973.

⁴ Mike Davis, Prisoners of the American Dream, London: Verso, 1986.

unquestioned both on the job and in the larger society.⁵ The CIO did not become, despite the efforts and intentions of many activists, a force for greater democratic control of unions by rank-and-file workers or an anti-capitalist/pro-socialist force within society.

Nonetheless, in Canada as in the United States, the CIO was an extremely important force for social change since it helped bring about an unprecedented level of unionization. It also won important concessions from capital and the state that benefitted the whole working class. Worker discontent during the war and the massive strike wave immediately afterward were, according to Panitch and Swartz, largely responsible for the establishment of an industrial relations system based on free collective bargaining which replaced the use of "ad hoc coercive and conciliation mechanisms" by the Canadian state.⁶ However, these wartime legislative gains did not always translate into immediate benefits and union security for workers.⁷

Despite the progress, union and worker rights in Canada were still significantly restricted. "The parameters and practices of legalism," according to Greg Albo, strictly defined the legitimate sphere of union activity, with free collective bargaining being premised on the acceptance of management's control over

⁵ Kim Moody, 1988. op. cit., p. 15.

⁶ Leo Panitch and Donald Swartz, The Assault on Trade Union Freedoms: From Consent to Coercion Revisited, Toronto: Garamond Press, 1988, pp.13-18. The key pieces of legislation affecting worker/employer relations were order-in-council 1003 (1944) and the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act (1948) which was accompanied by similar legislation from the provinces.

⁷ Bob Russell, Back to Work?: Labour, State, and Industrial Relations in Canada, Scarborough: Nelson Canada, 1990, pp. 209-14.

production.⁸ The famous "Rand award" of early 1946 became a linchpin in the newly evolving industrial relations system. The terms of this decision are recounted by Bob Russell.

Unions would assume the role of administrative apparatuses charged with carrying out the negotiated laws of the work-place. For this service they would be entitled to receive a direct fee from each employee in the work force, collected at the expense of the employer.... In return for assured access to employment revenues, trade unions were required to uphold the contents of the labour contract as the law of the plant. Failure to act accordingly would result in revocation of the automatic check-off, the lifeline of the union. This tied union organizations more strongly than ever to political definitions of legality and illegality in industrial relations.⁹

Heron notes that maintenance of employers' privileges was considered so essential that "most employers insisted on including a 'management rights' clause in each collective agreement that gave the companies exclusive control over all questions of organizing the labour process in the firm, including staffing, work routines and new technology".¹⁰

The basis of this accord was an expanding economy which allowed for higher wages and the maintenance of a welfare system, albeit a severely limited one.¹¹ Jane

⁸ Gregory Albo, "The 'New Realism' and Canadian Workers", in James Bickerton and Alain Gagnon, (eds.), Canadian Politics: An Introduction to the Discipline, Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1990, p. 477.

⁹ Bob Russell, 1990, op. cit., pp. 224-25.

¹⁰ Craig Heron, 1989, op. cit., p. 87.

¹¹ David Wolfe, "The Canadian State in Comparative Perspective", The Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology, Vol. 26, No. 1 (February), 1989, pp. 95-126.

Jenson characterizes Canada's new industrial arrangement as a form of "permeable" Fordism in that the state plays a much more modified role than in many European countries. It intervened in industrial conflicts on a case-by-case basis with the purpose of bringing about a compromise between capital and labour based on perceived economic realities such as regional unevenness.¹² The roots of the fragmentation of the Canadian labour movement and its inability to become an industrial and economic partner with capital and the state, according to Drache and Glasbeek, reside in the nature of Canada's export-led economy based on resource extraction. On the basis of this economic situation the Canadian state became committed only to a modified form of Keynesianism and the establishment of an industrial relations system designed to place considerable restrictions on the rights of workers.¹³

Such developments, argues Albo, fostered the growth of "responsible unionism" rather than "social unionism". Whereas social unionism saw unions as "part of a broader political project of working-class resistance to the domination of capitalist social relations in the work-place and community", "responsible" unionism viewed the antagonisms as capable of resolution through negotiation and accommodation.¹⁴ While Albo notes that these two "paths" were "never exclusive",

¹² Jane Jenson, "'Different' but not 'Exceptional': Canada's Permeable Fordism", Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology, Vol. 26, No. 1 (February), 1989, pp. 69-94.

¹³ Daniel Drache and Harry Glasbeek, The Changing Workplace: Reshaping Canada's Industrial Relations System. Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 1992, pp. viii-x.

¹⁴ Gregory Albo, 1990. op. cit., p. 474.

by the end of the 1940's responsible unionism was securely rooted in "the leading sections of the Canadian working class".¹⁵ This dominant type of unionism, according to Frank Annunziato, is most appropriately called "commodity unionism" since union members essentially become consumers of the commodity "union representation" which is sold to them by trade union leaders and the staff who are the principal producers of the commodity.¹⁶ Regardless of the term employed to characterize the type of unionism, the central thrust of it was the embrace of market principles and practices and their greater acceptance as legitimate institutions within capitalism.¹⁷

The cold war of the late 1940's and 1950's provided a useful political environment for the purging of communist and other radical unionists who opposed "responsible" unionism. Where communist leadership could not be purged an entire union was isolated from the labour movement and raided.¹⁸ "Legitimate" unions came to accept and work within the confines of the industrial relations system and to advocate no more than moderate reform of capitalism. In order to maintain the

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 474, 478.

¹⁶ Frank R. Annunziato, "Commodity Unionism", Rethinking Marxism, Vol. 3, No. 2 (Summer), 1990, pp. 24-5.

¹⁷ According to Annunziato, the term "commodity unionism" is preferable to "business unionism" because the latter "glosses over the trade union movement's unique economic activities" and ignores the fact that it is "a specific site for commodity production and distribution. Ibid., pp.9-10. The term "commodity unionism" is also favoured by Annunziato because both the "business unionism" of Gompers and the "industrial unionism" of the CIO evolved into commodity unionism. Ibid., p. 24.

¹⁸ Craig Heron, 1989, op. cit., p. 90.

legitimate status of the union, as well as their own legitimacy, the leadership was obliged to teach their members to accept the limitations provided in the system and to constrain their members from violating its laws and regulations. This put union leaders in a contradictory position, according to Drache and Glasbeek, because they had to either "Uphold the collective agreement but alienate the rank and file, or break the law and act in accordance with the apparent wishes of the members".¹⁹

The emphasis on the collective agreement affected union goals and processes according to John Calvert:

Unions became institutions absorbed with negotiations, arbitrations and labour board hearings. The idea of a labour movement involving social, cultural and community dimensions was supplanted to a large extent by the concept of unions as organizations which provided bargaining and arbitration services.²⁰

This view of unions and their institutionalization took hold in the 1950's and was thoroughly ensconced by the early 1960's. The legal restrictions on unions encouraged "contract" unionism. Union leaders and rank and file alike were pressured to substitute workplace action with what Rinehart refers to as "an individualized, bureaucratically structured (and painfully slow) grievance procedure."²¹

Despite the limitations placed on workers by the industrial relations system and

¹⁹ Daniel Drache and Harry Glasbeek, 1992, op.cit., p. x.

²⁰ John Calvert, "Unchartered Waters: The Labour Movement's Dilemma in Developing a New Role Beyond the Bargaining System", in Working People and Hard Times, R. Argue, C. Gannage, D.W. Livingstone, eds., Toronto: Garamond Press, 1987, p. 308.

²¹ James W. Rinehart, The Tyranny of Work: Alienation and the Labour Process, (2nd edition) Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987, p. 196.

compliant union leaders, a new wave of worker unrest swept Canada in the late 1960's. Provoked by the technological changes at the workplace which threatened workers' jobs and by rising inflation, the unrest broke the relative tranquillity of the 1950's and early 1960's.²² To a significant degree, this protest represented a rebellion against union leadership as well as the restrictions of the industrial relations system, which failed to address issues of control at the workplace.²³ While it initially violated the industrial relations norms through illegal work stoppages, this radical response mainly emphasized specific workplace or monetary issues that were resolved through the collective bargaining process.

Canadian unionism came to rely on state-sponsored collective bargaining structures and strategies that were developed in the 1940's and consolidated in the 1950's and 1960's. As George DeMartino argues, the use of collective bargaining as the sole or central union function has not permitted unions to easily move beyond the workplace and build alliances among working people in the larger community. Such community organizing and mobilizing go beyond what is required to win a collective agreement and sometimes violate the rules of the industrial relations system.²⁴ However, if such a strategy is adopted it is often only for the purpose of winning a new collective agreement. Hence, according to DeMartino, "a crippling paradox emerges: mass mobilizing that unites trade unions with other movements has as its

²² Craig Heron, 1989, op. cit., pp. 100-102; Gregory Albo, 1990, op. cit., p. 478.

²³ Craig Heron, 1989, op. cit., p. 104.

²⁴ George DeMartino, "Trade Union Isolation and the Catechism of the Left", Rethinking Marxism, Vol. 4, No. 3 (Fall), 1991, pp. 29-51.

primary goal the securing of a relationship with an employer that necessarily re-establishes the basis of trade union isolation".²⁵ Although the isolation of Canadian unionism was somewhat ameliorated because of its affiliation to the CCF/New Democratic Party, political action was still largely contained within electoral politics. The containment within collective bargaining and electoral politics was to become a more widely recognized problem as the period of post-war expansion came to an end in the mid 1970's.

This study does not deal with the post 1972 period when the contradictions and limitations of the post-war arrangement clearly manifested themselves in all sectors of the economy. However, due to the instability of the Sydney steel industry during most of the early post-war period, the workers at the plant were confronted with a challenge that would not be experienced by Ontario steel workers until the 1980's. The challenge to Sydney steel workers was to resist the employer's attempt to make them pay for its worsening competitive position within the steel industry. This situation prompted the adoption of strategies and forms of resistance by the workers that the leadership was ill prepared for, or unwilling to support. These were to become the focus for debate and internal conflict within the union.

B) Intra-Union Conflicts and the Study of Post-War Unions: Clarifications

The literature briefly reviewed above contributes to our understanding of unionism in Canada (and the United States) and the central role unions play within

²⁵ Ibid., p. 36.

class relations and class conflict. It demonstrates that unions were crucial in bringing about the economic and political gains won by the working class. Yet, there is little attention given to internal union developments and their relationship to these broader struggles. Much of the literature implies, even if it does not explicitly state, that internal union developments are simply a reaction to external stimulus or threat such as the demands of capital and the state or a change in the economy. The most notable exception to this among Canadian studies is Charlotte Yates' study of the Canadian section of the United Auto Workers.²⁶ Also, there are many studies which focus on changes that are occurring in the workplace and how various groups of workers resist and adapt to these changes. In Canada, this line of inquiry was pursued by James Rinehart in his path-breaking book, The Tyranny of Work, which dealt with the alienation of labour under capitalism.²⁷ However, because of the focus on the process of exploitation, such studies reveal much more about struggles within the workplace than they do about intra-union conflicts. These two types of conflict are two different but related sets of phenomena. With one the focus is the workplace and the disputed rules that govern it. With the other the centre of attention becomes the workers' organization and how they debate and struggle over the strategies and policies to be pursued within the workplace, at the bargaining table and in the larger political arena.

²⁶ Charlotte Yates, "From Plant to Politics: The Canadian UAW, 1936-1984", Ph.D. Dissertation, Carleton University, 1988.

²⁷ James Rinehart, Op. cit., 1987.

While factors "external" to the union are important for understanding intra-union conflicts, the latter must not be viewed as merely the product of external developments. Internal and external are dialectically related. The outcome of intra-union conflicts can restrict or enhance the ability of organized workers to resist capitalist exploitation and change their work environment, their union and their society. What Hyman calls the "internal relations of power" can be made the focus of study in examining union developments providing that we also take into account the "external relations of power". According to him, most marxist writing on trade unionism "displays one of two opposing forms of one-sidedness".

Either overwhelming weight is placed on the determinant effect of the logic of capitalist development.... Or else the contradictions within capitalism are treated as a source of almost unqualified openness for working-class collective action.... The one approach effectively denies the potential or significance of conscious human (and specifically working-class) practice in the face of the structural determinations of capital; while in the other the scope for working-class creativity is treated as unlimited regardless of the material context.²⁸

The predominant tendency within contemporary social science literature in North America has been to err in the direction of the former position.

The importance of internal union developments and in particular intra-union conflict can be more fully appreciated when we consider the specific issues which are encompassed by it. The increased bureaucratization of unions, the relationship of union leadership to the rank and file, factionalism, the diminished role of rank-and-

²⁸ Richard Hyman, 1989, op. cit., p. 137.

file mobilization, the increase in reliance on legalistic solutions to conflicts, restrictions on union democracy and the deradicalization of unions are all generally acknowledged to be significant developments within the post-war union movement. However, there has been little investigation of these developments within the Canadian context.

When they are addressed, these issues are often seen as aspects or outcomes of the establishment of industrial legality, or the state-mediated "accord" between capital and labour. There is little recognition that these developments were contentious issues within the organized working class itself. The implication in much of the literature is that all of organized labour accepted **only** one version of compromise and that it was the only credible and possible choice available. However, by focusing attention on intra-union conflict, as this dissertation does, we see that other versions of compromise were advocated by some union elements and that some aspects of the compromise continued to be opposed after its implementation. While a revolutionary or anti-capitalist "solution" to the conflict between capital and labour was not possible, a more militant and aggressive stance by labour based on greater mobilization of union members and deeper solidarity among various unions was fought for by some workers. The success of such an alternative, it could be argued, may have solidified a stronger position for labour with more worker-friendly institutional arrangements.

As I became more deeply involved in my study I became aware that it is

important to stress, as does Charlotte Yates, that unions are not "unitary actors".²⁹ In analyzing classes, class relations or class-based organizations, it is necessary to highlight their salient and most prominent features, but we must see these characteristics as dominant at a particular historical moment. Very importantly, they are dominant in spite of opposition from within these formations. Similarly, the goals, strategies and tactics of unions are in part the product of internal union debate that revolves around the general question of how best to respond to the challenges posed by capital or some other threat. It is important to heed Hyman's warning that the separation of the way in which union strategies are formulated and implemented from the external patterns of conflict and collaboration tends toward the reification of the organizational dynamics of trade unions and the suppression of the role of workers' collective struggles.³⁰

Why and how a particular strategy is chosen while others are suppressed focuses the dissertation on internal union politics. We shall see in the following chapters that the role of oppositional forces within unions and the impact they have on union policy and strategy are an integral part of union political life. These oppositional forces may take various forms. They may be organized factions or diffuse "rank-and-file" elements within the membership. Oppositional forces may draw their principal support from particular occupational, ethnic, religious or other groups within the membership or they may reflect widespread support. They may be

²⁹ Charlotte Yates. 1988, op. cit.

³⁰ Richard Hyman. 1989, op. cit., pp. 107-08.

led by workers with a clearly stated political ideology and affiliation to a particular political party or they may be led by independent militants of various and undefined political stripes. The oppositionists may function at the local level or they may attempt to ally with oppositionists in other locals and thereby form a national or regionally based movement. For this reason the much used concepts of "left" and "right" are not used although the opposition within the USWA during the period under study was generally more militant and radical than the official or established leadership of the union. The terms opposition, oppositionists or oppositional forces are used to analyze those within the union who opposed the "established" leadership at the local, national or international level.

For the purpose of this study the local leadership refers to the local executive of the union. While stewards or "committee men" may arguably be considered part of this leadership, it was often difficult to identify them and to know how supportive they were of the local executive. In the case of the USWA the national leadership refers to the Canadian Director of the union and the District Directors, as well as the staff representatives who were hired by them to oversee union policy implementation in the locals and to act as resource people for the locals. They were clearly answerable to the national office in Toronto and not the local. The international leadership refers to the executive officers and executive board of the entire union which was based in Pittsburgh. The two most important positions on the international executive were those of President and Secretary-Treasurer. While the Canadian Director and the District Directors in Canada were technically international officers, I

have referred to them, as well as the staff officers hired by them, as part of the national leadership so as to distinguish them from their American counterparts.

Union elections are an obvious means by which factions or the rank and file challenge established union officials. However, they are not the only manifestations of internal union conflict and are not even necessarily the most important. This study examines various struggles over competing strategies and practices. These strategies and practices include those advocated by both the opposition and establishment leadership. They include ones condoned or supported by the majority of members as well as those that were discouraged or actively opposed by them. Whether the competing strategies and practices were militant or accommodationist, spontaneous or carefully planned, in accordance with or in violation of the regulations established by the industrial relations system, are also important questions to be considered. In the case of the steel union, those strategies and practices which were accommodationist, cautiously planned and within the bounds of the industrial relations system were usually, but not always, initiated or supported by the official leadership. Those which were militant, spontaneous and not sanctioned by the industrial relations system were usually discouraged or opposed by union officials, but often advocated by oppositionists within the union. This was especially true in the period after the union and its leadership achieved legitimacy with the employer and the state.

A related set of questions addressed in the dissertation is the impact that oppositional forces had on union policies and strategies. How did they affect the outcome of particular conflicts and the possibilities for future progress in defending

the interests of the union members? Were oppositional forces at least in part responsible for initiating or preventing the adoption of particular policies and strategies (e.g. strike)? Did they influence the members to respond to a particular issue? Did such responses lead to greater solidarity among workers, or did they result in divisions and disorganization among union members? Were they responsible for shortening or prolonging conflicts, and did they make a difference in terms of winning or losing?

Another important set of questions focuses on the relationship between the oppositional leaders and union officials. Were the concerns of the opposition at least treated as legitimate by the official leadership, or did the latter attempt to marginalize and discredit them? Did this enhance or restrict democracy within the union, in particular the opportunity for involvement by union members? Did this greater or lesser measure of democracy affect the ability of the union to resist the attacks by the employer or the state?

The dissertation attempts to answer questions originally addressed by classical Marxists and Michels. Does leadership change make a difference? The question refers to the differences between established and oppositional leadership and the possibilities each presents for change. Do changes in leadership bring about transformations in relations between leadership and the rank and file and the level of democracy within the union? Do they affect a union's direction and in particular its key strategies and policies?

C) The Unique Position of Sydney Steel Workers in the Post-War Period

The study of unionism among the steel workers of Sydney, Nova Scotia, is a promising way of exploring internal union dynamics and their relationship to post-war economic and social conditions. First, there is a history of militancy among the Sydney steel workers that dates back to the turn of the century. The steel industry grew in the midst of the coal fields of Cape Breton, where cohesive working-class communities were already well established.³¹ Long before the period under study, coal miners in Cape Breton were winning union recognition and other concessions from their employers through militant action.³² This militancy could not but affect the Sydney steel workers who lived and worked in close proximity to the miners and sold their labour power to the same corporation, which was usually based in central Canada. This proximity and common "enemy" produced a fairly close and cooperative relationship between miners and steel workers and made industrial Cape Breton a site of intense class conflict in the early decades of the century.³³ So

³¹ Del Muise, "The Making of an Industrial Community: Cape Breton Coal Towns, 1867-1900" in D. MacGillivray and B. Tennyson (eds.), Cape Breton Historical Essays, Sydney: College of Cape Breton Press, 1980, pp. 76-94.

³² Kirby Abbot, "South-Side Cape Breton Miners: A Sociological Summary of Pre 1879 to 1951 Transformations", M.A. Thesis, Carleton University, 1985; Michael Earle and Ian McKay, "Introduction: Industrial Legality in Nova Scotia" in Michael Earle (ed.) Workers and the State in Nova Scotia, Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1989.

³³ Paul MacEwan, Miners and Steelworkers: Labour in Cape Breton, Toronto: Hakkert, 1976; David Frank, "The Cape Breton Coal Miners, 1917-1925", Ph.D. Dissertation, Dalhousie University, 1979; Donald MacGillivray, "Military Aid to the Civil Power: The Cape Breton Experience in the 1920's", in Cape Breton Historical Essays, D. MacGillivray and B. Tennyson, (eds.) Sydney, University College of Cape Breton, 1980; Craig Heron, Working in Steel: The Early Years in Canada, 1883-1935, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988; Michael Earle, "The Rise and Fall of a 'Red'

important was the relationship between the steel workers and miners, according to Heron, that it explains in part why union organization among steel workers was stronger in Sydney than in Hamilton.³⁴

The tradition of militancy among the steel workers could be expected to conflict with the cautious and bureaucratic responses of top union officials. The SWOC/USWA was a highly bureaucratized top-down organization from its inception and the USWA national and international leadership was not very open to the idea of increased participation by the rank and file.³⁵ From the late 1930's until the early 1950's, the top SWOC/USWA leadership actively worked to contain the participation and influence of communists within the union and other activists who allied with

Union: The Amalgamated Mine Workers of Nova Scotia, 1932-1936", M.A. Thesis, Dalhousie University, 1984; Michael Earle, "Radicalism in Decline: Labour and Politics in Industrial Cape Breton, 1930-1950", Ph.D. Dissertation, Dalhousie University, 1990; and Ron Crawley, "Class Conflict and the Establishment of the Sydney Steel Industry, 1899-1904" in The Island: New Perspectives on Cape Breton's History, 1713-1990, Kenneth Donovan (ed), Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1990, pp. 145-164.

³⁴ Craig Heron, 1988, op. cit., p. 136.

³⁵ Robert R. Brooks, As Steel Goes, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1940; Lloyd Ulman, The Government of the Steel Workers' Union, New York: Wiley and Sons, 1962; John Herling, Right to Challenge: People and Power in the Steelworkers Union, New York: Harper and Row, 1972; Phillip W. Nyden, Steelworkers Rank and File: The Political Economy of a Union Reform Movement, New York: Praeger, 1984; David Brody, "The Origins of Modern Steel Unionism: The SWOC Era", in P.F. Clark, P. Gottlieb and D. Kennedy (eds.), Forging a Union of Steel: Phillip Murray, SWOC, and the United Steelworkers, Ithaca: ILR Press, 1987; Stuart Jamieson, Industrial Relations in Canada, 2nd edition, Toronto: Macmillan, 1973; Staughton Lynd, "The Possibility of Radicalism in the Early 1930's: The Case of Steel", Radical America, Vol. VI (November-December), 1972, pp.37-64.

them.³⁶

The containment of militancy and radicalism within the union local commonly entailed the curtailing of local autonomy. The leadership aggressively intervened in the administration of the contract and dealt sternly with those who encouraged strikes in violation of it.³⁷ Resistance from the membership to such intervention was common but often fragmented and ineffective. Research on rank-and-file resistance within the American section of the USWA shows that the efforts to elect more militant leadership and change union policies and practices were somewhat successful at the local level. However, the structures, processes and leadership at the national and international level remained basically unchanged.³⁸

This is not to suggest that national/international leadership and the policies they advocated were always more conservative than those of the local. The Sydney local was often led by conservative or moderate leaders who closely cooperated with like-minded leaders at the upper levels. The view that democracy and militancy are always defended by local level leaders or that more local autonomy and less bureaucracy automatically lead to greater militancy and more progressive unionism

³⁶ H.A. Logan, Trade Unions in Canada: Their Development and Functioning, Toronto: Macmillan, 1948; G. Montero, "George MacEachern: Organizing Sydney's Steelworkers in the Thirties", in We Stood Together, G. Montero (ed.), Toronto: James 1979, pp. 47-68; M. Solski & J. Smaller, Mine-Mill: The History of the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers in Canada since 1895, Ottawa: 1984.

³⁷ Irving Abella, 1973. op. cit.; David Brody, op. cit., 1987.

³⁸ Phillip W. Nyden, op. cit., 1984.

has been criticized by Demartino.³⁹ Nor is it wholly supported by this study, although in the SWOC years local autonomy was an important issue. The conditions under which oppositional forces at Sydney, rather than the local leadership per se, were able to resist the constraints imposed by the union's national and international leadership are addressed in the dissertation.

Another important fact about Sydney steel workers that makes them an especially interesting case study is that they worked in an industry which has been marked by recurring crises. The steel industry in Canada became concentrated in Ontario and Nova Scotia, with the Ontario segment becoming much more securely established and less prone to crisis. The uneven development within the Canadian industry created special problems for SWOC and the USWA. The goal of industry-wide or pattern bargaining was compromised by this unevenness, as was wage parity between steel workers in Ontario and Nova Scotia. While accommodation to it was the reaction by some union leaders, many Sydney steel workers persisted in their efforts to eliminate the inequality between themselves and their Ontario counterparts.

According to Heron, due to the centrality of the industry within Sydney, focusing community sentiment was easier there than in multi-industry communities such as Hamilton.⁴⁰ However, the USWA's practice of "responsible" unionism, characterized by a strict adherence to the limits imposed by the contract, was not well suited to dealing with the crisis-ridden Sydney steel industry. The limitations of such

³⁹ See George DeMartino, *op. cit.*, pp.45-6.

⁴⁰ Craig Heron, 1988, *op. cit.*, pp. 135-36.

unionism in addressing issues of investment and job control in Sydney became clear by the 1960's. The varying response to these weaknesses by union officials, oppositionists and other rank-and-file members, marked the growing tensions and cleavages within the union.

The study of intra-union conflict must be informed by an understanding of the larger political economy and the balance of class forces at particular conjunctures. The condition of the steel industry, the strength and direction of the USWA and the larger union movement, and the role of the state in mediating conflict are factors that provide an important context for understanding this intra-union conflict. The dissertation highlights key moments in the history of the union. These key moments often focus on specific workplace conflicts that relate to struggles over the direction and policy of the union and the choice of leadership. They also include sanctioned strikes as well as unauthorized work stoppages. Job actions related to demands for greater economic benefits and ones which challenged the control and ownership of the means of production are included. Strikes are especially important events, Rick Fantasia has argued, because they serve "as a catalyst in challenging existing relations of domination and subordination, not only in the work place but in the surrounding community."⁴¹ They are part of what he calls "cultures of solidarity", but they can also sometimes illuminate a union's internal conflicts and dynamics. While strikes are especially important and quite accessible to us through historical sources, Rinehart points out that there are other ways in which workers attempt to humanize their

⁴¹ Rick Fantasia, 1988. op. cit., p. 218.

workplace. They include slow-downs and other means of restricting output.⁴² These job actions also will be addressed within the limits imposed by the historical record.

An analysis of these key moments also elaborates the ways in which particular unions have been incorporated into the industrial relations system and the ways in which they have resisted the tendencies toward the complete institutionalization of conflict. In this regard the dissertation parallels Yates' study of the Canadian division of the United Auto Workers (UAW). She concluded that the Canadian UAW was not entirely enmeshed in the post-war compromise until the early 1960's due to the existence of particular organizational structures and the persistence therein of left-wing activists who resisted tendencies toward demobilization and institutionalization.⁴³ This research attempts to show that the USWA was different in that it was more securely ensconced within the system at a much earlier date despite the resistance from many USWA members. This resistance is glimpsed in Bill Freeman's study of the USWA's Hamilton local 1005 in which he analyses the local's political life in the context of elections and leadership changes. Because his study focuses on union electoral politics and pays scant attention to other forms or expressions of intra-union conflict, the scope of intra-union struggles portrayed in his study is limited. Freeman's study also deals strictly with local union politics and does not closely examine relations between the local and other levels of the union.⁴⁴

⁴² James Rinehart, 1987, op. cit., pp. 147-156.

⁴³ Charlotte Yates, 1988, op. cit.

⁴⁴ Bill Freeman, 1005: Political life in a Union Local, Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1982.

The primary focus of the dissertation is the Sydney steel workers and their union, local 1064 of the United Steel Workers of America. However, it also includes an examination of the local's role in national union politics and the intervention of the national leadership within the local. Therefore, the local union as the focal point of the dissertation offers a vantage point from which to examine developments within the entire USWA. This facilitates the contrast and comparison of developments in Sydney's local 1064 with those of the other two basic steel locals at Algoma and STELCO. While the study does not examine other unions the reference to Yates' work does offer a point of comparison. Furthermore, the study of the key problems and limitations of unionism within the steel industry suggests that they are worthy of study in the larger context of Canadian industrial unionism.

D) Research Sources

This study of industrial unionism spanning a thirty-five year period has required access to a variety of historical documents. These include three groups of union documents. The first is the collection of microfilmed material deposited by the USWA in the National Archives of Canada. It contains the proceedings of meetings of national and regional union bodies, the official publications of the national and international union, and correspondence by union officials at all levels of the union. Together these documents are important resources for analyzing the sometimes conflicting ways in which particular problems were perceived and addressed by competing elements within the union. The second source of union documents is the

official record of the weekly membership meetings of USWA local 1064. These union minutes have been crucial in providing a view of the issues from the perspective of local members. Third are the collections of miscellaneous material held by the Beaton Institute at the University College of Cape Breton and the Provincial Archives of Nova Scotia. These documents consist principally of union and company reports and correspondence.

Another type of resource is the non-union publications which commented on union developments within the steel industry. These include the daily newspapers published in Sydney and Halifax which focused on industry developments. They also include the weekly left-wing publication, Steelworker and Miner (later Steelworker), which provided a very critical view on developments within the union as well as the industry. It also was an important source of information on issues being debated in the union. The demise of the Steelworker in the early 1950's eliminated an important public forum which union oppositionists used to express their views.

The other important source of data was interviews with steel workers who were actively involved in the conflicts under study. These oral reports played mainly a confirmatory role in that they helped to verify and elaborate events and issues mentioned in the written sources. Sometimes, however, they were the sole source of information on union developments or they added new insights on various issues.

Another important asset should also be mentioned since it has helped inform my approach to the study of Sydney steel workers and their union. That is the author's experience as a resident of Sydney until age twenty-five. Almost all of my

adult male relatives worked at the steel plant and I also was employed there one summer. Since leaving Sydney I have maintained ongoing contact with family and friends who work at the plant. Although this experience occurred for the most part after the events which I discuss, and although I took no part in these events, my connection to Sydney and some of the people who work at its steel plant has nonetheless provided some insight into the problems faced by the industry and the people who depended on it.

All of the resources mentioned above bring together a substantial and rich deposit of historical data. Each of the sources is important, but any single one on them would be inadequate in providing the data necessary to analyze union developments with confidence. Together the various resources make the task of analyzing such complex events possible.

Chapter IV

THE FOUNDING OF SWOC AND THE EMERGENCE OF OPPOSITIONAL FORCES, 1936-1942

A) Introduction

The Sydney steel industry had its beginnings in 1899 when the Dominion Iron and Steel Company (DISCO) was formed by American industrial promoter H.M. Whitney and Montreal financiers. Some of these same capitalists had already formed the Dominion Coal Company in 1893 and taken over most of the coal mines on Cape Breton island. When primary steel production began in 1901, DISCO was the largest iron and steel producing plant in Canada. The optimism that initially surrounded the plant was soon tempered by charges of mismanagement, difficulties in obtaining markets for the plant's product and the imposition of a wage reduction which precipitated the first plant-wide strike in 1904.¹

As a means of achieving stability, DISCO and the Dominion Coal Company merged in 1910 to form the Dominion Steel Corporation (DOSCO). However, further financial and economic difficulties in the post-World War I period forced the industry to undergo other major reorganizations. The first occurred in 1920-21 when the British Empire Steel Company (BESCO) was formed by merging the entire Nova

¹ Ron Crawley, 1990, op. cit.

Scotia steel and coal industries as well as the Halifax shipyards.² In an attempt to maintain profitability, the new corporation cut the wages of the miners and fought the steel workers over the right to unionize. This led to intense conflicts with its work force between 1922 and 1925.³ BESCO was successful in preventing the miners and steel workers from making gains, but was once again reorganized in 1928 as the Dominion Steel and Coal Company (DOSCO).⁴ However, the industry's recovery was postponed by the depression of the early 1930's. Once again the workers were forced to carry the burden of the economic crisis when the steel company reduced wages by 15% in 1932. In 1933, the plant was shut down completely, and in 1934 it was barely operational.⁵ By 1937, DOSCO was clearly recovering from the depression. It began to substantially re-equip its plant and expand its industrial empire.⁶

The renewal of the steel industry was accompanied by a resurgence in organizing activity among the steel workers. When the Steel Workers Organizing Committee (SWOC) was founded in 1936 under the auspices of the CIO, steel workers in Canada were either ineffectively organized in independent local unions or

² David Frank, "Working Class Politics: The Election of J.B. McLachlan, 1916-1935" in K. Donovan (ed.), The Island: New Perspectives on Cape Breton History, 1713-1990, Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1990, p. 120.

³ Don MacGillivray, 1980, op. cit., pp. 95-102; David Frank, op. cit., 1979.

⁴ David Schwartzman, "Mergers in the Nova Scotia Coal Fields: A History of the Dominion Coal Company, 1893-1940", Ph.D. Thesis, Berkeley University, 1952-53.

⁵ Paul MacEwan, 1976, op. cit., p. 207.

⁶ David Schwartzman, 1953, op. cit., p. 263.

unorganized. The industrial recovery created optimism among the leaders of SWOC about the prospects of organizing the North American steel industry. But they maintained a cautious approach to fighting the steel companies and were even somewhat mistrustful of steel worker militants who insisted on a more combative approach to the companies. International and national SWOC officials were very concerned with impressing upon the steel companies and the state that they and their organizations represented "responsible" unionism. Their bureaucratic and centralized approach to union building put the leadership at odds with activists who desired more autonomy for the union's locals and Canadian section and more democracy within the union generally.

One of the major goals of the national and international leadership was to contain these militant and radical tendencies by removing from staff positions those who advocated a more combative and autonomous strategy. In particular, communists in these positions were targeted since they were not only often leaders of the most militant workers, but also an embarrassment to a union leadership that was seeking legitimacy from employers and government. Furthermore, communists and other radicals in staff positions could not only embarrass the international leadership in their dealings with the steel companies and the state, but they could also potentially organize opposition to the leadership and its policies.

Despite the conflicts that were to develop between local activists and high-level union leaders, the organizing of the Sydney local was possible in large measure because of the considerable unity that existed among local activists of different

ideological and political orientations. This unity was somewhat strained by the strategy and actions of the international leadership, but in the interests of preserving this unity many local activists followed a more moderate direction than they had pursued originally. The purging of radical staff members and the compromise by local militants and radicals did not mean an end to the latter's influence in the local. It did, however, severely limit their effectiveness as an oppositional force and the ability to affect change within the larger union.

B) The Roots of Militancy and Radicalism Among Sydney Steel Workers

Between the turn of the century and 1936 there had been several attempts by Sydney steel workers to organize an effective union. These attempts were part of a larger struggle by the Cape Breton working class to free themselves from the arbitrary rule of capital. The leading force in this effort was the coal miners who, along with the steel workers, launched numerous job actions against the company that owned the coal and steel industries. The most important of these actions were the Sydney steel strikes of 1904 and 1923 and the Cape Breton coal strikes of 1909, 1917, 1922, 1924 and 1925, all of which involved the armed intervention of the state.⁷ These strikes were essentially defensive actions that, at best, were only partially successful. This

⁷ See David Frank, 1979, op. cit.; Don MacGillivray, 1979, op. cit.; Ron Crawley, 1980, op. cit.; Craig Heron, 1988, op. cit.; and Michael Earle, 1990, op. cit. As Bryan Palmer (1992, op. cit.) points out, the retreat of labour in other parts of Canada occurred immediately after the defeat of the Winnipeg general strike in 1919. Therefore, the militancy of Cape Breton workers in the early 1920's was atypical of what was occurring in the rest of the country.

period was followed by one of decreased working-class militancy which lasted throughout the late 1920's and into the early 1930's.

It was not until a decade after the unsuccessful 1923 strike that the Sydney steel workers again began to organize a union. This renewal of action was led mainly by workers connected to the social democratic Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) or the Communist Party of Canada (CPC). Many of them saw their struggle as part of a larger working-class movement designed to transform Canadian society.⁸ The more radical among them were inspired by the apparent successes of the Bolshevik-led revolution in the Soviet Union. This influence was evident at a "mass meeting" of Sydney steel workers held in the early 1930's "for the purpose of giving the steel workers' delegate to the Soviet union a sendoff and formulating a list of questions to be answered by the delegate on his return, and also giving an explanation of the reasons for sending a delegation to the Soviet Union at the present time."⁹ The leaflet advertising the meeting urged the steel workers to "Come and Hear Rousing Speeches and Inspiring Music!", the former to be supplied by, among others, the militant ex-miner and communist, J.B. McLachlan.¹⁰

⁸ These influences were felt most in the coal mining communities. For analyses of the influence of radical politics on the working class movement of Cape Breton see Michael Earle, "The Coal Miners and Their 'Red' Union: The Amalgamated Mine Workers of Nova Scotia, 1932-1936", *Labour/Le Travail*, No. 22 (Fall) 1988, pp. 99-137; John Manley, "Preaching the Red Stuff: J.B. McLachlan, Communism, and the Cape Breton Miners, 1922-35", *Labour/Le Travail*, No. 30 (Fall) 1992, pp. 65-114; and David Frank, 1990, *op. cit.*

⁹ MG 19,7, Leaflet 291, N.D. (circa 1935), Beaton Institute, University College of Cape Breton.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Other evidence of radical working-class politics among the steel workers was to be found in the pages of the Steelworker and Miner which regularly criticized the steel and coal companies as well as the governments. It also called on steel workers and miners to take militant action. It was Marxist in its orientation and until 1944 carried on its masthead the slogan, "Workers of the World Unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains; you have a world to gain." Its editors proclaimed it to be fighting for freedom "from Capitalist Exploitation" and called it the "official Organ of the Class-Conscious Workers of Sydney." It claimed to be "The only Workers' paper east of Toronto" and the largest circulation weekly east of Montreal with a readership of 30,000. Its editor, M.A MacKenzie, according to George MacEachern, had been a Communist Party member for a short time in the early 1930's and afterward remained sympathetic to the Soviet Union and generally supportive of the Communist Party of Canada despite some tensions.¹¹ Other leading left-wing intellectuals in the region, such as J.C. Mortimer and Roscoe Fillmore, also wrote regularly for the paper. It regularly included letters from steel workers and miners. Its willingness to criticize and even fiercely attack CCF politicians and trade union leaders from a left perspective made it unique.¹²

The origins of local 1064 were rooted in the self-reliance and militancy of the Sydney steel workers. Prior to SWOC's formation in 1936, an independent union had

¹¹ MacEachern was a steel worker activist during the 1930's and 1940's and was also a member of the CPC.

¹² The Steelworker and Miner, or Steelworker as it was later called, was published weekly in Sydney between 1933 and 1954.

been started at Sydney. It was begun in defiance of the company-sponsored employees' representation plan which some steel workers had participated in since the end of the 1923 strike. Although the new independent union achieved some success, it was not able to organize and mobilize the majority of workers at the plant.¹³ When the Committee for Industrial Organizations (CIO) began to organize mass production industries such as steel, union activists at the Sydney plant sought affiliation with the organization. On December 13, 1936, Sydney's Lodge 1064 became an affiliate local of the Steel Workers Organizing Committee (SWOC) which was based in Pittsburgh.¹⁴ The executive of lodge 1064 immediately approached the members of the DOSCO council and convinced them to join the union and in effect bring the company-sponsored council to an end.¹⁵ As with many SWOC locals in the United States, SWOC steel workers at Sydney had essentially occupied and subverted the plant council.¹⁶

DOSCO soon responded to the union threat by voluntarily granting modest wage increases. However, this only attracted further support for the union which grew

¹³ David Frank and Don MacGillivray, (eds.), George MacEachern: An Autobiography, Sydney: University College of Cape Breton, 1987.

¹⁴ Frank Smith, "Brief History of Local 1064 United Steel Workers of America and its Achievements", pamphlet, Sydney: United Steel Workers of America, 1985, p.11. According to Freeman, 1982, op. cit., p. 29, Stelco's local 1005 became the first SWOC local in Canada when it was founded June 21, 1936.

¹⁵ Lodge 1064 A.A. of I.S. & T.W. of N.A. to the General Works Committee of the Dosco Employees Representation Plan, February 13, 1937, Misc. U. USWA Reel 2, PANS.

¹⁶ Steelworker and Miner, (Sydney), May 8, 1937, NAC.

to over three thousand members within a matter of months. All the union work in the local was "done by local, unpaid workers in their spare time", a fact of which activists were very proud.¹⁷ So impressive were the efforts of the Sydney local and the promise it held for the entire Canadian steel industry that the international SWOC leadership decided that Canada, then considered a part of the Buffalo sub-district, was to be made a separate district. Silby Barrett, a long-time official of the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) in Cape Breton, was appointed to direct the efforts of the CIO in Canada and thus became the first de facto Canadian Director of SWOC.¹⁸

Once organized, the steel workers set about to build a union based on militancy, rank-and-file participation and solidarity with other workers. In 1937, the newly organized steel workers cooperated with the coal miners of Nova Scotia to win the first provincial trade union act in Canada. Under its provisions a referendum on the issue of a dues "check-off" for Sydney steel workers was held and won by local 1064. However, DOSCO was determined to prevent effective unionization, and it arbitrarily refused to continue the check-off, a move which the union protested as a violation of the newly won legislation.¹⁹ The dues check-off was considered to be extremely important in achieving financial stability for the union since a voluntary

¹⁷ John Johnstone to David MacDonald, May 20, 1937, Misc. U, USWA Reel 2, PANS: Cape Breton Post (Sydney), September 2, 1963.

¹⁸ M.T. Montgomery to John Johnson, September 4, 1937, Misc. U, USWA 1064 Reel 2, PANS. Barrett was a staunch opponent of the radicals within the UMWA. See David Frank, 1979, op. cit. and Michael Earle, 1988, op.cit.

¹⁹ Lodge 1064 to Angus L. MacDonald, July 2, 1937, Misc. U USWA PANS, Reel 2, PANS.

payment of dues by underpaid steel workers would bring dues from only a portion of the workers. Union pins as well as a password were issued to union members who were in good standing.²⁰

In the face of the refusal by the company to recognize the union, the workers decided to take job action. The action was not plant-wide, but based on department-wide action. In June 1937, the dock workers at the plant carried out a successful "stand-up strike" over the issue of seniority.²¹ This was followed by a strike among bar-mill workers that was initially over "a misunderstanding in negotiations for an adjustment of wages," but soon became a dispute about dues check-off and recognition of the union by the employer.²² The strike appeared to have occurred without any initiative from the union executive, but they fully supported the strike and welcomed the workers' militancy as leverage in pressuring the company to meet union demands. The local executive also supported the right of the bar-mill departmental committee to accompany the union executive to a meeting with management even though the company refused to allow it. Nevertheless, J.W. Gray, Assistant General Manager of the plant, insisted that the strike did not have the authorization of the union, by which he undoubtedly meant the national and international leadership.²³ Finally, a settlement was reached when the union executive and the mill committee

²⁰ Lodge 1064 to D. MacDonald, June 1, 1937, and Financial Secretary of Local 1064 to David MacDonald, June 14, 1937, Misc. U, USWA, Reel 2, PANS.

²¹ Steelworker and Miner, June 5, 1937.

²² Department of Labour, Strike file, RG 27, Vol. 388, File 168, NAC.

²³ Dept of Labour strike file, RG 27, vol 388, file 168, NAC.

met the Premier and Minister of Mines.²⁴ This departmental-based job action indicated the rising militancy of the steel workers, but also reflected the steel workers' lack of plant-wide organization.

The dues check-off was granted shortly after the bar-mill strike, but it did not undercut the militancy of the workers and the determination of the local leadership as feared by some within the left-wing community.²⁵ When the company later ignored seniority and overlooked union men in filling vacancies within the bar-mill, the workers struck again. The company still refused to address the concerns of the strikers and so the rod-mill workers struck in support of them. The local executive supported both actions.²⁶ When government representatives intervened to request that the workers end the strike as a precondition to negotiating the issue, SWOC 1064 Corresponding Secretary George MacEachern responded that "it would be impossible for men with union principle" to accept such preconditions.²⁷ From the sidelines the editor of the Steelworker and Miner voiced support for the strikers and reminded them that they were "blazing a trail - the trail of working-class solidarity."²⁸

The strike finally ended when Silby Barrett, Canadian Director of SWOC,

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Steelworker and Miner, July 17, 1937. This was the fear expressed by the editor of the Steelworker and Miner who congratulated the union, but warned them "to keep their eyes open for new tracks to sabotage the union" and in particular to be aware of the talk of "cooperation" which is "the lion talking co-operation to the lamb."

²⁶ Steelworker and Miner, October 9, 1937.

²⁷ Department of Labour, Strike File, RG 27, Vol 392, File 276, NAC.

²⁸ Steelworker and Miner September 18, 1937.

intervened to pressure the local executive to recommend a return to work pending an investigation of the matter. This the executive did, but the workers insisted on a vote to decide the issue, the result being an 8 to 1 ratio in favour of ending the strike.²⁹ This was apparently the first such intervention in a local 1064 strike by a national or international SWOC representative. Its effect was to undermine rank-and-file militancy and to end the strike without a clear resolution of the issue. The dissatisfaction with the intervention by the national and international leadership marked the beginning of an oppositional movement within the union which would oppose the practices and policies of the national and international leadership on a range of issues.

Other job actions occurred which forced DOSCO to negotiate various "departmental" issues. For example, a strike by Open Hearth workers occurred when a foreman tried to dismiss a worker unjustly. Coke Ovens Department workers also struck over the reduction of the number of men at the ovens.³⁰ Virtually the entire work force was in a state of ferment, according to Frank Murphy, an Open Hearth Department worker and union activist. As evidence of this, he described the elaborate signalling system the steel workers had devised to spread the word of strike. Key activists in each department would communicate that strike action had commenced by simply picking up the departmental telephone and stating to the worker in another

²⁹ Steelworker and Miner, October 9, 1937.

³⁰ Steelworker and Miner, September 18, 1937; SWOC Local 1064 Union Bulletin, September 18, 24, 1937, Misc. U, USWA 1064, Reel 2, PANS.

department, "the bird has flown." This was the cue for workers in the next department to strike if possible.³¹

Despite this departmental activity, the company still refused to bargain on wages and other important plant-wide issues. One of the tactics used by DOSCO officials was to "red-bait" the more radical members of the local leadership. For example, DOSCO superintendent Kelley pointed out in a meeting of DOSCO and union representatives that Corresponding Secretary George MacEachern was recently elected a member of the Executive of the Communist Party of Canada. To this MacEachern replied, "I am very proud that I was elected to that position in recognition of the work I have done for the party during the past number of years."³² As a way of dealing with such company attacks the local executive circulated to the membership minutes of the meeting where the exchange occurred.³³

The executive continued to support job actions initiated by the rank and file as long as the company remained intransigent. When dock workers refused to work Sundays during the summer of 1938, local 1064 president Carl Neville reminded all steel workers that "scabbing" would be dealt with "in the most effective way possible

³¹ Frank Murphy, Interview, April 15, 1993. An amusing incident connected with one of these job actions occurred when a supervisor discovered the code and threatened that someone would be fired "if that bird flies once more".

³² Union Executive to SWOC 1064 Members, December 11, 1937, Misc. U. USWA 1064, PANS.

³³ Ibid.

by the union."³⁴ However, the local union executive was willing to intervene to end a work stoppage if it appeared that management was finally willing to bargain seriously. Such action was taken by local union officials when galvanizers in the wire and nail mill struck over the issue of a wage cut. The workers ended their strike, but the intervention by the executive quickly brought criticism from some union militants.³⁵

These early strikes clearly demonstrate that there was not only a high degree of militancy among rank-and-file steel workers at Sydney, but that militant action was often taken independent of any sanctioning by local, national or international union officials. Indeed, such action probably would not have been taken if the decision had been left to the national or international leadership. Internal union relations at the local level were quite fluid and based on a high degree of input from the membership, including workplace votes to decide whether or not a job action should continue. The existence within the union and the larger community of a relatively small but active left-wing element, which included communists, independent radicals and left-wing social democrats, promoted a militant and democratic brand of unionism. It also exerted pressure on the more moderate or cautious elements within the local leadership to initiate and support militant action. Of course, local union officials also received considerable pressure from the national and international leadership.

³⁴ Carl Neville to all Local 1064 Members, June 16, 1938, Misc. U., USWA 1064, Reel 2, PANS.

³⁵ Union News, June 25, 1938, MG 28, Beaton Institute; Steelworker and Miner, June 11, 25, 1938.

The democratic traditions of the steel workers clearly placed limits on the power and influence of union leaders. The local leadership reminded the union members of this fact through the local's Union News and regular meetings instead of relying on the Canadian edition of USWA's bland and uninspiring Steel Labor.³⁶ The emphasis on democracy and the participation of the rank and file was promoted in the slogan, "Every Member a Union Builder." To encourage participation, the executive stressed the idea that, "A union is not a machine, into which can be placed dues and out of which automatically, comes improved benefits - Policies and actions can only be decided collectively by the membership."³⁷ Whereas many previous union-building attempts at Sydney had attracted mainly skilled Anglo-Saxon steel workers, the SWOC effort clearly appealed to a large cross-section of workers in the non-Anglo-Saxon community, including blacks.³⁸

The class consciousness of local union leaders countered the tendency towards parochialism or narrow self-interest. The local leadership and many of the rank-and-file members saw their movement as much bigger than either the local or even the entire SWOC. For example, a resolution passed by the local and sent to the international headquarters called for the publication of a periodical paper "that will

³⁶ SWOC Local 1064 Minutes, April 6, 1938.

³⁷ Union News, April 15, 1938, MB 28, Beaton Institute.

³⁸ There is evidence that there was racism within the union. When Dowling Street was nominated to the Coke Ovens Grievance Committee and a fellow worker objected to him serving as such on the basis of his "colour", the majority at a union meeting chose to ignore the racism rather than censure it. See SWOC Local 1064 Minutes, February 23, 1938.

present and protect... the interests and needs of all classes that toil for their existence."³⁹ Also, during the 1937 "little steel" strike in the United States, collections were taken up at the plant and many Sydney workers contributed one hour's pay to the strikers. Again in early 1938, the local contributed \$100 and organized collections at the Sydney plant in support of striking Ohio steel workers.⁴⁰ The alliance of communist, social democratic and independent radicals allowed the local union to reach out for support from a variety of progressive groups with various political orientations. When the Clarion, publication of the Communist Party of Canada, offered the local a full page of coverage each month, the union accepted the offer.⁴¹ Also, when the Workers' Educational League, which was composed of left-wing intellectuals, approached the union about offering education on labour and unions, they were welcomed.⁴²

Another important feature of the union local in this period was that its influence was widely felt in the community, as it provided tangible support to other workers. For instance, The Unemployed and Part-time Workers' Union was organized and promoted by local 1064.⁴³ Local 1064 also supported workers in the community

³⁹ Local 1064 Resolution, January 17, 1939, Misc U, USWA Local 1064 Reel 2, PANS.

⁴⁰ MacDonald to SWOC Lodges, June 26, 1937, Misc. U., USWA Local 1064; SWOC Local 1064 Minutes, January 26, 1938.

⁴¹ SWOC Local 1064 Minutes, January 26, 1938.

⁴² SWOC Local 1064 Minutes, January 26 and February 9, 1938.

⁴³ Union News, April 15, 1938, MB 28, Beaton Institute; Steelworker and Miner, February 26, 1938.

who went on strike, as it did by calling for a boycott of the Post-Record when the paper's employees struck.⁴⁴ When striking clerks and truck drivers at a local store approached the union for help, the latter intervened with organizational support and put enough pressure on the owner to resolve the strike in the workers' favour. The union's influence was such that virtually all locally based employers took seriously its advice and its warnings. For example, when ex-steelworker and labour leader Foreman Waye was fired from his job at the Atlantic Engineering Works because he was a union man, a committee from local 1064 executive met with the management who then reinstated Waye.⁴⁵

Its civic role also extended beyond support for other working-class organizations. At one union meeting, some members criticized the union for being "lax in looking after the welfare of working-class children in this city," and the meeting then decided to contribute to a fund for a "swimming resort" for children at a local beach.⁴⁶ The local took independent action in civic elections, as in 1940 when it endorsed George B. Slaven for re-election as Mayor.⁴⁷ Civic leaders running for office also solicited the support of the union, as in the case of councillor Seymour Hines who stated in a letter to the local union that he had "taken the stand for the class of which I belong namely the working class and if elected in January I shall take

⁴⁴ Steelworker and Miner, April 12, 1940.

⁴⁵ Union News, April 23, 1938, MB 28, Beaton Institute.

⁴⁶ Union News, June 18, 1938 MG 19,7 D2f2, Beaton Institute.

⁴⁷ Steelworker, January 6, 1940.

the same stand."⁴⁸ Such involvement in civic affairs was important, as evidenced when a union member was being evicted and a visit to the mayor by a union committee resulted in the man and his family being allowed to stay in their home.⁴⁹ A physical symbol of the union's growing presence in the community was the meeting hall in the centrally located district of Ashby that had been purchased to accommodate larger meetings of the union membership.⁵⁰

On political matters, the local was independent of any political party, although most of its executive members were supporters of either the CCF or the CP. Because of this, the union would publicize meetings of communists as well as social democrats.⁵¹ It strongly defended the right of free political expression for all its members, including communists, as in 1940 when it protested the raiding of a member's home by the RCMP under the War Measures Act.⁵² Such independent political action was very much the result of the "United Front" strategy pursued by the communists. It called for cooperation with the social democrats and the mainstream of the labour movement in order to build alliances against fascism.⁵³

⁴⁸ Seymour Hines to Sydney Lodge 1064, December 21, 1937, Misc. U., Reel 2, PANS.

⁴⁹ SWOC Local 1064 Minutes, August 31, 1938.

⁵⁰ Union News, June 18, 1938, MG 19,7 D2f2, Beaton Institute.

⁵¹ MG 19,7 d2f3, Beaton Institute.

⁵² Steelworker, March 23, 1940.

⁵³ Michael Earle, 1990, op. cit., argues that the united front strategy was an extremely important element in the unionization of both the steel workers and the coal miners.

However, if this strategy offered opportunities, it also placed limitations on communist members who were then open to criticism from the more independent radicals associated with the Steelworker. On one occasion the editor of the radical paper criticized the union for doing most of its advertising in the Post-Record, which he referred to as "the DOSCO organ". He facetiously asked whether this was part of the united front strategy.⁵⁴ The united front was also under pressure from social democrats within the local who called for the union to affiliate with the CCF. Such a call came when the UMWA convention affiliated with the CCF, but the communists and other militants in the local insisted that they wanted independent political action by the union. They proposed non-partisan political committees within the local, which resulted in the local's participation in a newly found Cape Breton "Permanent Joint Council for Political Action."⁵⁵

The united front appears to have worked fairly well despite the tensions within the union concerning political questions. Union activists of any political stripe usually respected the right of members to choose a political affiliation even if they disagreed with the politics. The communists showed themselves to be especially receptive to the united front policy. For instance, when David Lewis and Angus MacInnis were to speak to the local on behalf of the CCF, a member of the committee formed to

⁵⁴ Steelworker March 11, 1939. The Steelworker had its supporters among independent militants who welcomed the inclusion of union news and commentary in the paper. See SWOC Local 1064 Minutes, May 15, 1940.

⁵⁵ See SWOC Local 1064 Minutes, Dec 14, 1938; February 8, 15 and March 1, 1939.

organize the event included well known communist steelworker George MacEachern.⁵⁶ The united front strategy also allowed for union donations to be given to either the CCF or to the Communist Party's paper.⁵⁷ In the case of the CCF, official union delegates even attended conventions, but this sometimes created conflict within the local. For example, when George MacEachern was appointed a delegate to the CCF convention, a union member objected that he was attending the meeting as a member of the Communist Party. In response, MacEachern stated that he was going as a member of the union and that he "had never let Party interest interfere with instructions from the union."⁵⁸ It appears that the only action that could not be taken without threatening the united front was direct interference in the union's affairs by either political party.

C) Local Autonomy Versus International Control

In the early years of the USWA's history, according to Nyden, the top leadership of the union maintained an adversarial approach to management and encouraged a high degree of rank-and-file participation in the union. He argues that "the grassroots worker movement and union were synonymous" and one could not distinguish between a "'rank-and-file reform movement' and a more conservative

⁵⁶ SWOC Local 1064 Minutes, October 5, 1938.

⁵⁷ SWOC Local 1064 Minutes, May 10, 17, 1939 and March 6, 1940.

⁵⁸ SWOC Local 1064 Minutes, May 24, 1939.

union leadership."⁵⁹ It was not until the late 1940's when relations between the union and companies were stable that the union's leadership began to play what Nyden calls "a social control role" with regards to the rank and file.⁶⁰

Lichtenstein presents a slightly different view by arguing that SWOC's top union officials recognized that militancy was sometimes necessary, but only until the union was established. However, they "mistrusted such sentiments when they shaped union activity after negotiation of a binding collective-bargaining agreement."⁶¹ The close monitoring of, and intervention in, local union affairs included performing standard financial transactions for locals, appointing union staff and leading local negotiations and was designed to contain irresponsible actions as well as corruption.⁶² Lloyd Ulman supports this view, pointing out that the SWOC leadership resisted the pressure from the rank and file to have union elections for positions above the local level and to hold regular conventions.⁶³ The evidence presented in this chapter supports the view that national and international SWOC leaders wanted to maintain tight control of the organization, if it restricted the rights of the union membership.

The preoccupation of the leadership with obtaining the recognition and

⁵⁹ Phillip W. Nyden, 1984, op. cit., pp. 17, 23.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 25.

⁶¹ Nelson Lichtenstein, 1982, op. cit., p. 21.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Lloyd Ulman, 1962, op. cit., p. 8.

acceptance of employers led to a bureaucratic and accommodationist approach to union building. It affected the union's organizing strategy in Canada and in particular the alliances it sought in the larger community. One of the most valued of these allies was organized religion, especially the Catholic Church, which had collaborated with the union leadership in the United States. SWOC's Canadian Director, Silby Barrett, apparently solicited testimonials in support of the union from priests in Nova Scotia as well as from provincial Premier Angus L. MacDonald, with whom he was said to have an "excellent relationship." The union leadership's obsession with employer recognition also ensured that publicity material arriving in Canada from the international union headquarters portrayed SWOC as "a truly responsible union, with a record for observance of contracts unsurpassed in the history of the American labor movement." SWOC President Philip Murray made it clear that the USWA was a pragmatic organization dedicated to unionism based on "a signed contract as something sacred - a pact to be observed; an agreement which is your bond of good faith."⁶⁴

Not surprisingly, the pursuit of a first contract on such a basis conflicted with the approach of militant and radical unionists. The intervention of the international office into the first contract negotiations at Sydney clearly demonstrated this tension. Negotiations for the union were taken over by the Canadian Director of SWOC and "Senator Sneed" of the international headquarters after DOSCO refused to deal with

⁶⁴ Acting Secretary, National Office to Silby Barrett, N.D.(circa 1937), MG 28 I 268, NAC.

local union representatives.⁶⁵ After meeting with company representatives the Canadian Director proclaimed that DOSCO's management "now realized that the best results would be derived in dealing with the international union."⁶⁶ This did not impress the local executive, however, which immediately criticized the Canadian Director for meeting alone with DOSCO officials to discuss a contract when the local executive had no prior knowledge of the meeting.⁶⁷

The contract finally proposed by these high ranking SWOC officials was not well received by either the Sydney steel workers or local union officials who participated in the negotiations. The latter were willing to recommend it to the membership only because they were persuaded that it could "serve as a starting point and form a basis for further negotiations when business conditions warrant its reopening." However, when it was finally discussed "clause by clause" at a meeting of 1000 steel workers it was voted on and rejected.⁶⁸ The Canadian Director was reportedly told by the steel workers, "You've sold us!"⁶⁹

A major point of contention was the power that the contract provided the company at the workplace. In particular, paragraph three, section eight of the contract reportedly stated that, "Any employee who refuses to carry out the instructions of his

⁶⁵ Union News, June 18, 1938, MG 19,7, d2f2, Beaton Institute.

⁶⁶ Union News, May 28, 1938, MB 28, Beaton Institute.

⁶⁷ SWOC Local 1064 Minutes, May 25, June 1, 1938.

⁶⁸ Union News, July 23, 1938, MB 28; Radio Address by Norman MacKenzie, 1940 MG 19,13, Beaton Institute.

⁶⁹ Steelworker and Miner, July 23, 1938.

superintendent, or representative, or refuses to carry out work assigned him ... may be summarily dismissed from the company's service and the union agrees not to take any action."⁷⁰ One local activist stated that the contract would mean "that the company could do about as they pleased under the contract."⁷¹ Another problem was that the contract provided for no increase in wages.⁷² Steel workers were understandably angered when it was later reported in the pages of Steel Labor that the contract was accepted by the membership. This was undoubtedly a result of the eagerness of international union representatives to show the progress they were making with the companies.⁷³

In addition to endorsing an unpopular contract, the international leadership antagonized the Sydney steel workers by not consulting them on the appointment of union staff. In early 1939, a conference of SWOC was held at Amherst, Nova Scotia, at which national and international representatives were urged to hire a full-time organizer for Nova Scotia. That commitment was given, and it was understood by the Sydney delegates that the Nova Scotia locals would be consulted on who should be hired. But when Foreman Wayne was appointed a staff representative for Nova Scotia without consulting the locals, the local 1064 executive voiced objection to the

⁷⁰ Steelworker and Miner, July 30, 1938.

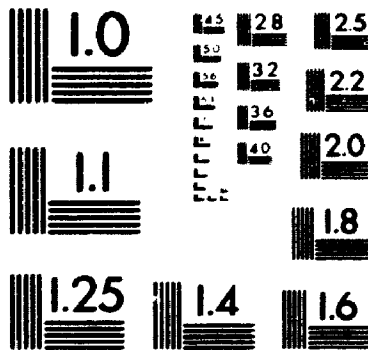
⁷¹ SWOC Local 1064 Minutes, July 13, 20, 1938.

⁷² SWOC Local 1064 Minutes, July 27, 1938; Steelworker, July 30, August 6, 13, 1938.

⁷³ Vincent Sweeny to Silby Barrett, September 28, 1938; Barrett to Sweeny, Dec 31, 1938. Misc. U. USWA 1064, Reel 2, PANS.

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Canadian Director.⁷⁴ Local 1064 President Carl Neville tendered his resignation in protest, stating that he would resume the post when "the rank and file had a vote on who would be our provincial representative." The resignation was rejected by a vote of 39 to 35, but Neville still refused to take his seat as President.⁷⁵ The dissatisfaction with the leadership's decision was voiced by local 1064's Acting President in a letter to the International President. In it, he raised the issues of autonomy and democracy:

We understand that we have Canadian autonomy. To us autonomy means self-government. Self-government presupposes the democratic system of choosing by ballot. Are we being denied that right? Have the steel workers in Nova Scotia fallen so low that they can not be entrusted with the responsibility of choosing their organizer or representative whichever it happens to be?

We wish to say that the workers organized this lodge, the workers maintain it and the workers are going to have a say in the running of it.⁷⁶

It was these developments that encouraged the founding of the Canadian Steel Workers' Union at Sydney by steel workers who decided that a complete break with the American-based union was needed. The principal proponent of the new organization was steel worker Doane Curtis, who attacked the SWOC by recalling the problems Sydney steel workers had with the American-based Association of Amalgamated Iron and Tin Workers, which had attempted to represent them in the

⁷⁴ SWOC Local 1064 Minutes, March 29, April 5, 1939.

⁷⁵ SWOC Local 1064 Minutes, April 5, 12, 1939.

⁷⁶ Local 1064 President to Philip Murray, March 31, 1939, Misc. U., USWA 1064, Reel 2, PANS.

period just prior to the 1923 strike. He argued that the SWOC was doing quite poorly in the rest of Canada and was using Sydney steel workers, who were the only dues-paying local in the country.⁷⁷ Indeed, evidence in support of this view was provided by a SWOC report on organization which noted that, "While the Maritime section of the organization was holding its own and making some progress, the central Canada situation had rapidly deteriorated."⁷⁸ Curtis stated that the Sydney steel workers had already paid over \$70,000 in dues during the first 22 months since the check-off was instituted. He also pointed out that the two recent department-wide strikes at Sydney received no financial assistance from the international headquarters; one strike was supported through a general collection among the steel workers and the other funded out of the local union treasury.⁷⁹

Curtis and other members of the new organization proposed that the SWOC local apply for affiliation to the All Canadian Congress of Labour (ACCL), but the resolution was not accepted for a vote by the local SWOC leadership. The latter argued that an international organization was needed to fight international capital and that the international union was investing much more money in Ontario than Sydney was sending south of the border. It was also argued by some local activists that the

⁷⁷ Sydney Post-Record, May 15, 1939.

⁷⁸ MG 28 I 268, SWOC Wage and Policy Conference Proceedings, Montreal, April 19-20, 1941, NAC.

⁷⁹ Sydney Post-Record May 15, 1939. An indication of the importance of the Sydney local to the entire SWOC effort in Canada was that the National Office of SWOC had to ask the local for a loan of \$150 (See SWOC Local 1064 Minutes, April 20, 1938).

international union was needed to fight fascism.⁸⁰ This undoubtedly was an argument made by the Communist Party members in the union and indicated that they were not supportive of the nationalist cause. This paralleled the stance taken by communists within the Canadian section of the United Auto Workers (UAW), according to Charlotte Yates, which also helped marginalize and ensure the defeat of "pronationalist" elements within that union.⁸¹

The challenge from the independent union was brief, but its publication, The Flyswatter, claimed that it was enough of a threat that SWOC issued a publication called the Ladle against it.⁸² Nevertheless, in light of the widespread dissatisfaction with some of the high-level SWOC leadership, the local SWOC leadership was fairly tolerant of the local advocates of the independent union. At first, they attempted through debate and discussion to dissuade the activists from continuing their efforts.⁸³ But they were less tolerant of A.R. Mosher, President of the ACCL, who they called a "union splitter," for promoting the independent union.⁸⁴ In a letter to the editor of the Steelworker, Mosher countered that the Sydney steel workers possessed "a deeprooted and justifiable objection to membership in a foreign-controlled organization to which they have to pay 75% of the dues collected and from

⁸⁰ SWOC Local 1064 Minutes, July 27, Aug 3, 1938.

⁸¹ Charlotte Yates, 1993, op. cit., p. 30.

⁸² The Doane Curtis Papers, MG 19, 1 Box 2, Beaton Institute.

⁸³ SWOC Local 1064 Minutes, April 27, 1938.

⁸⁴ Union News, April 30, 1938, MB 28, Beaton Institute.

which they receive no benefits financially or otherwise."⁸⁵

Finally, the SWOC local passed a resolution expelling Doane Curtis from the union and denying "voice and vote" for one year to other activists in the independent union.⁸⁶ Clearly the prestige of the CIO and its promise of uniting steel workers throughout North America was important in maintaining the allegiance of Sydney steel workers to SWOC. The collapse of the rival organization came when the ACCL made peace with the CIO and withdrew support from the independent union.⁸⁷ As for the disproportionately large financial contribution being made to SWOC by Sydney steel workers, this was motivated by union principle as well as a realization that the health of the Sydney local depended on the eventual organization of other key sectors within the industry. Indeed, Nova Scotia steel workers advocated better organization in Canada during meetings with Philip Murray and other international representatives.⁸⁸ Also, the leading role played by the Sydney and Trenton, Nova Scotia locals was thankfully acknowledged by the membership in Ontario, who saw that "the example of the Nova Scotia brothers in carrying aloft the banner of SWOC in Canada has been at one and the same time an inspiration and example to the

⁸⁵ The Steelworker, March 24, 1939.

⁸⁶ SWOC Local 1064 Minutes, April 26, 1939.

⁸⁷ Memoirs of Doane Curtis, pp. 20-2, MG 19.1 Box 3, Beaton Institute.

⁸⁸ Proceedings of SWOC 2nd Annual Wage and Policy Convention, Chicago, May 21-24, 1940, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

workers in Ontario."⁸⁹

The militancy of SWOC activists was rooted in the history of industrial Cape Breton. It was also encouraged by the uncompromising policies of DOSCO which refused to seriously negotiate resolution of key problems facing the steel workers. However, the national and international leadership took a more accommodationist attitude towards the employer. Their strategy included the minimum use of militancy and a moderation of the demands of the workers as a way of demonstrating their respect and understanding of the employer's need for profit and control over decisions concerning production. This approach came into conflict with the more radical approach of many union activists and led to calls for greater independence for the local and more democracy within the union.

D) The Leadership Response to Militancy and Radicalism

The rejection of the nationalist challenge and the reaffirmation of the CIO did not resolve tensions between the local and the international leadership. When DOSCO again refused to negotiate with the local union leadership in 1940, the workers in the coke ovens department decided to strike for "industrial democracy" and against the "family compact" tactics in hiring and promotion.⁹⁰ Many workers wanted to use "blitzkrieg" tactics, which would involve an immediate strike of all workers including

⁸⁹ Proceedings and Resolutions of National Policy Meetings, Amherst, Nova Scotia, May 4-5, 1939, MG 28 I 268, NAC; Union News, July 2, 1938, MB 28, Beaton Institute.

⁹⁰ Union Bulletin, February 10, 1940, MG 19,7 d2f3, Beaton Institute.

maintenance men who would prevent damage to the furnaces. The local union executive resisted this course of action because, according to them, it was not in keeping with "the policy of the union": that is, the policy as established by the international leadership.⁹¹

When the company still refused to address the basic demands of Sydney steel workers, the local union leadership called for a strike vote among the entire membership, which resulted in all but 297 of the 3200 steel workers voting in favour of strike. Local President Norman Mackenzie informed DOSCO officials that the plant would be struck on March 21, but that maintenance workers would be provided by the union as long as there was no attempt by the company to produce steel.⁹²

This proposed action was encouraged by the editor of the Steelworker, who reminded the executive that, "the rank and file expect you to take full uncompromising advantage of your position - your army has told you that they are willing to obey orders - to go over the top! Don't wilt. Rise to the occasion."⁹³ However, as the strike was about to begin, the executive announced that the strike was postponed pending results from a board of conciliation, which was requested by both DOSCO officials and SWOC's Canadian Director.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Union Bulletin, February 5, 1940, MG 19.7 D2f3, Beaton Institute.

⁹² "Strike Bulletin No.1", March 19, 1940, MG 19.7, d2f2, Beaton Institute; Steelworker, March 25, 1940.

⁹³ Steelworker, March 2, 1940.

⁹⁴ Steelworker, March 23, 30, 1940. Trenton workers had also voted overwhelming for strike and their case was also put before the conciliation board (See Steelworker, May 11, 1940).

The Canadian Director made it clear that if the strike occurred it would not be supported by the union's international headquarters. The local executive bowed to that pressure and reluctantly agreed to conciliation, but some members of the local called for the Canadian Director's resignation. The motion for his resignation was not accepted when it was pointed out that International Secretary-Treasurer David MacDonald had also played a role in "restraining the lodge from direct action."⁹⁵ Local 1064 President Norman Mackenzie later stated that the strike was called off because the international office "would not sanction it, advising and insisting on conciliation."⁹⁶ This intervention by international union officials was severely criticized by a Steelworker editorial which stated that many labour leaders "are trying to keep the workers quiet at all costs, to smother just complaints, to silence just demands, to make degrading compromises with the bosses and the government to drive back the rising tide of discontent."⁹⁷

The international office appointed American Philip Clowes to assist the local with the conciliation talks. After he attempted to assure the workers that the Conciliation Board was a good one and that the workers would be able to get "a reasonable agreement, the Board voted unanimously in favour of DOSCO. Clowes then advised the local that "you will get no more out of the company even if you were

⁹⁵ SWOC Local 1064 Minutes, March 20, April 3, 1940.

⁹⁶ Sydney Post-Record, January 1, 1942.

⁹⁷ Steelworker, July 6, 1940.

to come to strike."⁹⁸ The local executive reluctantly persuaded the workers to accept a contract based on the conciliation report.⁹⁹ It was ratified by a vote of 950 to 457, which represented a very small voter turn-out.¹⁰⁰ The intense dissatisfaction of the local membership was demonstrated when the local passed a resolution protesting against a statement in SWOC's Canadian edition of Steel Labour, which claimed that the settlement was a victory for steel workers.¹⁰¹

Union members continued to lash out at the Canadian Director for his role in subverting the strike. His defence was that he followed the policy of SWOC as interpreted by the international office, a policy which "is against local strikes."¹⁰² Many local activists insisted that the Canadian Director should be accountable to Canadian steel workers and pressed for the removal of Barrett. They were assured by the international leadership that action would be taken to correct problems in the entire Canadian section, but that this action would be based on a complete investigation of the situation by Philip Clowes.¹⁰³

The principal problem in the Canadian section of the union, from the perspective of the international leadership, was not the performance of the Canadian

⁹⁸ SWOC Local 1064 Minutes, April 17, July 3, 1940.

⁹⁹ SWOC Local 1064 Minutes, July 10, 24, 1940.

¹⁰⁰ Sydney Post-Record, January 1, 1941.

¹⁰¹ SWOC Local 1064 Minutes, September 25, 1940.

¹⁰² SWOC Local 1064 Minutes, April 17, 24, 1940.

¹⁰³ SWOC Local 1064 Minutes, May 29, 1940.

Director, but instead the fact that some paid officials of the union in Ontario were communists with considerable influence among the membership. This openly antagonistic view of communists challenged the united front strategy that had thus far united pro-union steel workers within the industry. The adoption of an anti-communist position was undoubtedly facilitated by the Soviet-Nazi Pact and the communists' passive opposition to the war in the 1939 to 1941 period.

The hiring of Charles Millard as a CIO staff person in Ontario and as a *de facto* assistant to the Canadian Director of SWOC had as a primary purpose the counteracting of communist influence within the CIO, and SWOC in particular. The eventual goal of Millard and the SWOC international leadership was the removal of communists and their sympathizers from key positions within the union. Millard's anti-communist credentials were already well established and recognized within the union movement. As a negotiator with Local 222 of the UAW he was in the forefront of opposing the left-wing within the union and its call for greater rank-and-file representation within the union. Because of this activity, an alliance of communists, CCFers, Canadian nationalists and militant trade unionists had organized his defeat in an election for Regional Director of the UAW.¹⁰⁴ Millard's conservative and anti-communist approach became evident in his work within SWOC.¹⁰⁵ For instance, it was seen in his attitude to SWOC local 1005 activist and communist Charles

¹⁰⁴ Charlotte Yates, 1993. *op. cit.*, pp. 26-29.

¹⁰⁵ According to SWOC activist Al Campbell (Interview, March 25, 1991), Millard's strongly religious and anti-communist views were well known by many SWOC activists before he became involved in the union.

McClure, whom Millard saw as guilty of "irresponsible leadership" because of his repeated calls for support of causes such as "Spanish Democracy."¹⁰⁶

The anti-communist position was also eagerly adopted by Philip Clowes who began to work closely with Millard. One of the immediate results of his work on behalf of SWOC's international headquarters was the dismissal of communist Dick Steele as the head of organizing in Ontario. His dismissal was immediately protested by a conference of Toronto SWOC lodges, but the Sydney local decided not to act on the issue until they received Clowes' report and an explanation from President Murray.¹⁰⁷ However, the view of many local 1064 activists was that Steele's *de facto* replacement, Charles Millard, was someone "whose record in the Canadian Labour movement is not so good."¹⁰⁸ This lack of respect for Millard and Barrett translated into sympathy for what was called the "rank-and-file movement" headed by Steele and various militants within SWOC's Ontario locals. The local union endorsed this "movement", because, as local 1064 president MacKenzie put it, "it is our conviction that the workers who are members of the S.W.O.C. in Canada must decide their own policies and elect their own officers and we further believe that it is most imperative that a constitution convention be called for this purpose in the immediate future."¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Millard to MacDonald, July 20, 1940, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹⁰⁷ SWOC Local 1064 Minutes, June 19, July 3, 1940.

¹⁰⁸ SWOC Local 1064 Minutes, August 7, 1940.

¹⁰⁹ Sydney Post-Record, January 1, 1941.

Communists within the Sydney local, such as George MacEachern, urged the local to give further support to the rank-and-file movement in Ontario "in their fight for democracy in the Canadian set up."¹¹⁰ Others in the local clearly sympathized with this view.¹¹¹ However, there were social democratic members who were very restrained in their support of the Ontario oppositionists. Their affiliation to the CCF and their ideological opposition to communism undoubtedly accounted for this; furthermore, according to George MacEachern, this position limited the support which others in the local could give the Ontario oppositionists.¹¹² Interestingly, there is no evidence that the communist affiliation of the leading oppositionists in the Ontario section of SWOC was ever raised as an issue in membership meetings at Sydney. This suggests that the "united front" was being maintained within the local even if it was strained by the firing of communists within SWOC's staff.

The oppositionists in Ontario did not attempt to break with SWOC and instead tried to build a movement within it to challenge the existing leadership in the Canadian section. This approach included an appeal to the union's president to intervene on their behalf. However Clowes, Millard, and Barrett had President Murray's full support.¹¹³ Indeed, because of this support, Millard dismissed Harry Hunter and Harry Hamburg, two other communists working for SWOC in Ontario.

¹¹⁰ SWOC Local 1064 Minutes, August 7, 1940.

¹¹¹ SWOC Local 1064 Minutes, Aug 28, 1940.

¹¹² George MacEachern, Interview, April 29, 1991..

¹¹³ Murray to Millard, September 5, 1940, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

Millard justified Hamburg's dismissal simply on the grounds that "it has been found necessary to make certain changes in the personnel of the SWOC."¹¹⁴

The "Ontario Executive", as the opposition leaders came to be known, attempted to build support within SWOC by passing a resolution that "the Sydney local be asked to call immediately a Canadian Steel Workers Convention to formulate policy for Canadian steel workers... and that our per capita be turned over to this executive for organizational purposes." This resolution was sent to the President of SWOC along with a letter which stated, "We in Canada have our own peculiar labour tradition and our own peculiar problems, and we are not inclined to be dictated to." They also appealed to President Murray to recognize the Ontario Executive as defending the true interests of SWOC and Canadian steel workers.¹¹⁵ The President responded that the opposition's actions were "a flagrant violation of our international regulations", but maintained that, "we are, at all times, open to criticism or reprimand, but, only if it comes as a constitutional expression."¹¹⁶ Ironically, the constitution had not yet been ratified by an elected body of steel workers. It was this same union constitution which gave the leadership the legitimacy and power to dismiss the radicals on staff. Furthermore, the constitution could only be changed at an international convention of the union where Canadian delegates would make up only a very small proportion of the delegates.

¹¹⁴ Millard to Harry Hamburg, September 17, 1940, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹¹⁵ Ward to Murray, October 8, 1940, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹¹⁶ Murray to Millard & Clowes, October 15, 1940; Millard to Ward, October 21, 1940, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

The suggestion that the Sydney local be a possible arbitrator in the dispute clearly indicates that there was substantial support in the local for the opposition. When Forman Waye, the SWOC staff representative in Sydney complained of the incessant "criticism of Barrett, Millard and the leaders," George MacEachern, a supporter of the Ontario opposition, replied that, "by their actions they deserve it," and that, "We ask for democracy and we have a dictatorship running the S.W.O.C."¹¹⁷ One of the instruments of this dictatorship, according to some activists in the local, was the international headquarters' special liaison officer and investigator, Philip Clowes. According to MacEachern, Clowes was little better than a thug whose tactics included the physical beating of Harry Hamburg and the purchase and use of liquor as a way of softening up the opposition.¹¹⁸ Another local 1064 activist, George MacNeil, assessed Clowes' role in more benign, but still uncomplimentary terms:

While he was here he put us straight on a lot of things and at times we put him straight. When he came back from Toronto and Ottawa he seemed to have queer ideas about these boards and top leadership looking after the workers. We did not agree on this, and we told him so.¹¹⁹

One of Clowes' main tasks in both Ontario and Nova Scotia was to limit the

¹¹⁷ SWOC Local 1064 Minutes, September 25, 1940.

¹¹⁸ George MacEachern, Interview, November 27, 1990. The charge of offering bribes of rum to delegates and using "American gangster tactics" was denied by Clowes (See SWOC Local 1064 Minutes, September 25, October 2, 1940).

¹¹⁹ SWOC Local 1064 Minutes, October 2, 1940.

damage to the union leadership's credibility by the firings of Steele and others.¹²⁰

From the national leadership's perspective, Clowes fulfilled his purpose very well in this regard and Millard expressed to President Murray his appreciation of Clowes' performance. Anticipating problems in the future, he also suggested that Clowes periodically be sent to work in the Canadian region.¹²¹ Of course, the Ontario opposition had a completely different view of him. Four locals in the Toronto area severely criticized Clowes, who they charged "has in the most autocratic fashion given Canadian steel workers to understand that they have no voice in the making of policy for Canada."¹²²

Due to his position in Ontario as well as his central role in the dismissal of the key Ontario oppositionists, Millard became the principal target for the opposition in Sydney. All aspects of his record with SWOC were scrutinized, including his "collaborating with the government and boss without any regard for the wishes of the rank and file".¹²³ SWOC's paper Steel Labour was also said to be promoting a policy of "fear" of strikes and collaboration with the government.¹²⁴ The SWOC leadership deflected these criticisms by suggesting that most of the Sydney oppositionists were "reds" or under their influence. This reputation was promoted by

¹²⁰ J. Smith to S. Barrett, July 6, 1940, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹²¹ Millard to Murray, September 20, 1940, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹²² J. Smith to Barrett, July 6, 1940, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹²³ SWOC Local 1064 Minutes, October 30, 1940.

¹²⁴ SWOC Local 1064 Minutes, October 30, 1940.

other anti-communist labour leaders. For instance, the table at which Sydney delegates sat during a 1940 CCL conference was called "red row".¹²⁵

Millard was also opposed because he represented the ascendancy of the CCF within the Canadian section of the union. He used his power in the union to have it contribute very substantially to the CCF, even against the wishes of many of the members. Millard privately informed Financial Secretary MacDonald in Pittsburgh that while not all locals had affiliated with the CCF, they would eventually do so, and that in the meantime the per capita affiliation dues of two cents per month per member "for our entire Canadian membership" should be sent to the CCF. If other locals do not affiliate, he argued, their per capita could be considered as a subscription.¹²⁶ This was in fact done and monthly cheques were sent from the international office to the CCF via the Canadian union headquarters in Toronto.¹²⁷ Clearly, the CCF leadership and national and international union leaders were already united in their opposition to rank-and-file militancy and "irresponsible" unionists. It was not only in the steel union that they actively opposed militancy. Within the UMWA they also worked against it by undermining the 1941 slow-down strike of Cape Breton coal miners.¹²⁸ Their prime concern was to oppose the participation of

¹²⁵ SWOC Local 1064 Minutes, October 2, 1940.

¹²⁶ Millard to MacDonald October 17, 1942, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹²⁷ MacDonald to Millard, November 27, 1942; MacDonald to Millard, January 19, 1943, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹²⁸ See Michael Earle, "'Down with Hitler and Silby Barrett': The Cape Breton Coal Miners' Slowdown Strike of 1941", Acadiensis, Vol. XVIII, No. I (Autumn) 1988, pp. 56-90.

communists and other radicals in the union movement. At Sydney, they proceeded to minimize their influence by winning the support of moderate elements within the union.

E) The Sydney Local Divided

Despite the intense dislike of Millard and what he represented by some local 1064 activists and the empathy felt towards the Ontario opposition on the part of many Sydney steel workers, the local did not provide unqualified support to the opposition. A request from the Ontario oppositionists that the Sydney local participate in a SWOC conference organized by them was discussed with much sympathy, but it was decided at a local membership meeting not to send a delegate to it until Clowes' report was complete.¹²⁹ A factor in this decision was that Millard had written to the Sydney local stating that local 1005 at STELCO had voted to stay loyal to the SWOC leadership.¹³⁰ Furthermore, a key figure in dissuading some Sydney activists from lending support to the Ontario oppositionists was SWOC's Nova Scotia representative, Forman Waye. According to Millard, Waye was keeping the Sydney local informed "of the true situation."¹³¹ Waye also informed Millard of criticisms of the national and international leadership such as when charges of "gangsterism" were made against Clowes, an action for which Waye was called "a stooge" by local 1064 activist

¹²⁹ SWOC Local 1064 Minutes, October 9, 23, 1940.

¹³⁰ SWOC Local 1064 Minutes, October 30, 1940.

¹³¹ Steelworker, January 25, 1941.

George MacEachern.¹³²

Despite Waye's influence in the local and assurances from Silby Barrett, who was still on the scene, SWOC's international office continued to be "concerned over (the) situation in Sydney".¹³³ Nonetheless, a measure of the division within the local was that even a visit from Harry Hunter on behalf of the Ontario "rank and file movement" could not bring about a decision to support the oppositionists fully.¹³⁴ The oppositionists within the Sydney local did manage to organize a union meeting to discuss whether the local should support the call for "a rank and file conference of representatives of SWOC locals including those who have repudiated the Millard-Barrett leadership."¹³⁵

Since a positive vote on the question would have greatly strengthened the position of the Ontario oppositionists and jeopardized the ability of the SWOC leadership to contain the opposition, Millard attended the meeting and was given the opportunity to explain his actions as well as those of other SWOC officials. Millard shrewdly began his remarks with fraternal greetings on behalf of the Algoma and STELCO locals as well as SWOC President Philip Murray. In defence of the firings of Steele and the other staff, he claimed that the Algoma local had refused to join SWOC as long as the communists remained on staff. Also, according to Millard,

¹³² SWOC Local 1064 Minutes, October 2, 1940.

¹³³ Millard to Clowes, October 15, 1940; Millard to Clowes, October 23, 1940, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹³⁴ SWOC Local 1064 Minutes, January 8, 1941.

¹³⁵ Steelworker, January 25, 1941.

Clowes had met with government officials and been told that they would not cooperate with communists on the staff. When Steele admitted to being a communist, "Clowes dismissed him." Hunter and Hamburg were then fired by Millard himself when they stated that they did not agree with the present policy of SWOC.¹³⁶

Later in the meeting Millard adopted a more aggressive stance. He read a letter from international Secretary-Treasurer MacDonald giving him the authority to take the strongest measures necessary to deal with the Ontario oppositionists. Reverting to a more compromising stance, Millard announced that a proper constitutional convention with procedures for electing officers would be held in 1942. He also promised that a Canadian policy conference would be held soon to resolve some of the problems in Canada. Most importantly, Millard appeared to make concessions to the Ontario oppositionists by stating that, "the Ontario Executive should be there if they become reinstated."¹³⁷

Millard's approach was well received by moderate activists because it satisfied the demand for a policy conference and appeared to allow for participation in it by the Ontario oppositionists. This had the effect of undermining some of the opposition to his leadership. The moderates also reminded other members of the local that although they had not yet been implemented, rank-and-file councils, which would allow greater participation in the union, had been approved by SWOC.¹³⁸ In light of the support

¹³⁶ SWOC Local 1064 Minutes, January 22, 1941.

¹³⁷ SWOC Local 1064 Minutes, January 22, 1941.

¹³⁸ SWOC Local 1064 Minutes, January 22, 1941.

for this moderate position, an insistence on a stronger show of support for the "Ontario Executive" could have split the union and jeopardized the opportunity to organize the steel industry.¹³⁹

No further attempts were made to mobilize the rank and file at Sydney around this issue. Millard cheerfully wrote MacDonald that the "former offensive has now become a defensive" and that "Waye reports that Sydney is greatly improved."¹⁴⁰ Barrett also assured him that in the Sydney local, "[t]he few trouble makers have pretty well lost their influence".¹⁴¹ Millard also happily observed that the oppositionists in Ontario "are being driven to a closer and more apparent association with communist influences."¹⁴²

Millard expressed his admiration to International Secretary-Treasurer MacDonald "for the very constructive manner in which you and Chairman Murray dealt with our Canadian situation." He assured MacDonald that "all our staff were not only impressed but have gained a new sense of organizational responsibility, as well as a much greater degree of loyalty as a result."¹⁴³ He was referring to the letter that was sent to all members of SWOC in Canada by Secretary-Treasurer MacDonald

¹³⁹ George MacEachern, Interview, December 2, 1991.

¹⁴⁰ Barrett to Millard, February 19, 1941; Millard to MacDonald, February 21, 1941, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹⁴¹ Millard to Barrett, February 24, 1941; Barrett to Millard, March 6, 1941, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹⁴² Millard to Clowes, February 13, 1941, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹⁴³ Millard to MacDonald, February 7, 19, 1941, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

notifying them that Millard, Barrett and other staff were the only legitimate representatives of SWOC in Canada.¹⁴⁴ However, it appears that at least two of the locals supporting the "dual movement" had been already placed "under administration" and others were being investigated by the Pittsburgh office.¹⁴⁵

The oppositionists within the Sydney local still planned to bring the issue of democracy to the union's next national policy conference. George MacEachern prepared and presented a brief to the local meeting which was to be adopted by the local and later read to the conference.¹⁴⁶ The President of local 1064 stated that developments were still at "a stage where a drastic change is necessary in the national policy of S.W.O.C in order to justify our continuance of it." The choices, he insisted, were to either:

string along with the appointed leaders of S.W.O.C. hoping that we may exert enough pressure to change their policy or to follow the lead of the Ontario executive. But I will draw the line on following this present policy of appeasement and compromise that is shearing the workers of their democratic rights and opening the way for fascism in Canada.¹⁴⁷

When the call for the SWOC conference finally occurred, the Sydney opposition was dismayed and angered to learn that the Ontario oppositionists had not received an invitation to attend the conference. Some within the Sydney local felt that

¹⁴⁴ MacDonald to all SWOC members, February 10, 1941, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹⁴⁵ Millard to MacDonald, December 17, 1940; Padget to Millard, January 11, 1941, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹⁴⁶ SWOC Local 1064 Minutes, February 19, 26, 1941.

¹⁴⁷ SWOC Local 1064 Minutes, February 19, 1941.

without the participation of oppositionists in Ontario the conference was incapable of formulating a "policy that expresses the opinion of the organized steel workers of Canada." According to oppositionists at Sydney, the arrangement did not "indicate a willingness on the part of the National Office to play ball with the rank and file workers." Despite these restrictions, it was decided after much debate that the local should be represented at the conference and its case presented.¹⁴⁸

Upon their return from the conference, the Sydney delegates reported at a "mass meeting" of local 1064 that the conference had "a great effect on the national leadership." But the conference had not been without conflict. The Sydney delegates had immediately questioned the make-up of delegates at the conference, which had only 35 to 40 delegates. However, this objection was ruled out of order. The Sydney delegate on the credentials committee brought in a minority report concerning the exclusion of the Ontario delegates, but it was defeated.¹⁴⁹ Through the persistence of Sydney delegates, a resolution was passed giving a representative of the "Ontario Executive" an opportunity to present its case. Harry Hunter spoke on its behalf and he announced that the "Ontario Executive" would recommend to the opposition locals that they ask for reinstatement in SWOC. The Sydney delegates also called for the election of all union officials, but this was ruled out of order by International Secretary-Treasurer MacDonald, who reminded them that a new constitutional

¹⁴⁸ SWOC Local 1064 Minutes, April 9, 1941.

¹⁴⁹ SWOC Local 1064 Minutes, April 27, 1941.

convention planned for 1942 would decide on these issues.¹⁵⁰ Remarkably, the proceedings of the SWOC conference made no direct reference to the stand taken by the Sydney delegates and stood in sharp contrast to their report on the conference.¹⁵¹

Overall, the delegates to the conference were satisfied that the direction of SWOC was changing "from collaboration to one of direct action", due in part to their success in pressuring Millard to resign from the Labour Supply Board.¹⁵² While the efforts of the local 1064 activists were successful in helping to bring the Ontario opposition locals back into the union and in reprimanding Millard and other leaders for their arbitrary and undemocratic practices, the dismissed staff representatives were not rehired. The international and national leadership had won since they had affirmed their right to hire and fire union staff as they so pleased. Any remaining oppositionists on the staff were made to feel very unwelcome, and new staff were carefully screened. For example, when Laurent Lecavalier, a Montreal staff worker, sent Millard his letter of resignation because "a rank-and-file policy" was not being followed by the leadership of the union, Millard dismissed his criticisms since he was "associating himself with known disruptors and fellow travellers." He replaced him with R.J. Lamoureux, who Millard reported "is a member of the Roman Catholic

¹⁵⁰ SWOC Local 1064 Minutes, April 27, 1941.

¹⁵¹ SWOC Wage and Policy Conference, Montreal, April 19-20, 1941, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹⁵² SWOC Local 1064 Minutes, April 27, 1941.

Church."¹⁵³

The purging of militants and radicals from staff positions effectively reduced the potential for resistance to the leadership since such people could have provided information to local oppositionists and even coordinated their efforts. Hence, the overall opposition within SWOC was contained, because it was isolated and fragmented at the local level. The occasional conferences which oppositionists attended provided the only opportunity for coordination. For example, a meeting of SWOC delegates to the 1941 CCL convention at Toronto actually discussed at length the necessity of removing the SWOC leadership. They passed a motion of censure against Silby Barrett and Millard by a vote of 64 to 19 for the unsatisfactory way in which the Peck Rolling Mills strike was being handled.¹⁵⁴

This motion of censure made no difference in terms of changing power relations within the union, since there was no established structure and network where oppositionists from various locals could meet and strategize. Al Campbell, who remembers the censure motion, commented that the left opposition often "won the debates" in conference sessions and sometimes won the vote, but these had little impact on Millard and the other SWOC leaders.¹⁵⁵ At SWOC conferences, Millard and other leaders could easily obtain the delegate votes needed to defeat opposition

¹⁵³ Lecavalier to Millard, June 17, 1941; Millard to MacDonald, June 30, 1941, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹⁵⁴ Report of SWOC delegates to CCL Convention, September 7, 1941, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹⁵⁵ Al Campbell, Interview, March 25, 1991.

resolutions. For example, several months after the censure of Millard, an oppositionist resolution stating the need for SWOC staff to be placed in steel producing communities and be acceptable to steel workers in those communities was easily defeated.¹⁵⁶

Having dismissed key oppositionists on the staff and neutralized much of the opposition in the locals, the national and international leadership confidently put an ultimatum before other potential dissenters holding a staff position. This Millard did by paraphrasing President Philip Murray's remarks at a recently held SWOC staff meeting in the United States, where he stated: "Any staff member who felt he could not give wholehearted allegiance to the SWOC, its officers and policies, should, for his own sake and the good of the organization, immediately resign."¹⁵⁷ So extensive was the rooting out of communists and radicals above the local level that even the union's solicitor in Canada, J. L. Cohen, was dismissed since, according to Millard, Cohen had "definitely aligned himself with the left-wingers and I have taken the position that we can't afford to be identified with the solicitor of that group."¹⁵⁸

The situation within the Canadian section of SWOC differed considerably from

¹⁵⁶ Proceedings, SWOC Conference of Basic Steel, Ottawa, December 3-5, 1941, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹⁵⁷ Millard to all SWOC Staff and Central Committeemen, December 17, 1941, MG 28 I 268, NAC. It is remarkable that in spite of President Murray's role in these purgings, he still enjoyed widespread admiration and support among Canadian steel workers, including radicals and militants. For example, a Steelworker editorial praised Murray's "sane and wholesome" approach to organizing as opposed to the selfish and political ambitions of John L. Lewis of the United Mine Workers (See Steelworker, August 1, 1942).

¹⁵⁸ Millard to MacDonald, September 12, 1942, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

that of the UAW where communists and other left-wing unionists had succeeded in not only ousting Millard, but also in establishing a "District Council" which consisted of rank-and-file delegates and met six times a year. The UAW Director and staff had voice but no vote at council meetings and the council itself was financed independently of the union administration through per capita membership payments.¹⁵⁹ Canadian SWOC members had no such forum for formulating policy and organizing resistance to union leadership. Instead, they were stuck with a moderate leadership which offered a very bureaucratic and cautious approach to combating the employers and governments.

F) Conclusion

By 1942, Sydney steel workers were able to establish a SWOC local that had won the dues check-off and a first, albeit unsatisfactory, contract from the company. This they accomplished through militant action and solidarity. As impressive as these achievements were, the workers still had not won full recognition from DOSCO, which still refused to bargain seriously on the most pressing issues. Many of the Sydney steel workers understood that in order to win and maintain substantial gains, militant action by workers in the Canadian basic steel industry would have to be undertaken. As they prepared to face their most important challenges, however, they did so with a very cautious and bureaucratic national and international leadership which had purged itself of staff representatives who would encourage a militant and

¹⁵⁹ Charlotte Yates, 1993, op. cit., p. 31.

aggressive approach to fighting the company.

The accommodationist and bureaucratic approach of high-level SWOC leadership was advocated under the guise of "responsible" unionism. It conflicted with the more militant and democratic practices of the local membership at Sydney. This led to some intense conflicts between the two, which marked the emergence of a significant oppositional movement. This experience contradicts Michels' view that increasing organizational size and bureaucracy are mainly responsible for the tendency toward oligarchy and lack of democracy. These developments, as the experience of the steel workers shows, are in part a product of conflicting forces within the union which oppose and support them. Undoubtedly, these internal forces are connected to and derive support from some larger social forces. In this regard, the evidence supports the Marxist view that union developments are very much connected to class conflict under capitalism.

That the oppositional forces were divided and fragmented from the beginning on the question of what goals and strategies were desirable and necessary and how to achieve them, is also supportive of the Marxist view which sees the politics and ideology of workers and leaders as important. For some SWOC members, the goal was a strong militant union with close ties to a larger socialist or radical movement. Others wanted an independent Canadian union of steel workers. For other steel workers, it was an autonomous and democratic Canadian section of an international union. For still others, the questions of union autonomy and democracy were secondary to the ability of the union to make concrete gains relating to wages and

other issues. The varying views on how much democracy and militancy were desirable or necessary and on who should or could lead the union created tensions which would persist in the local.

With the purging of oppositionists among the staff, oppositional forces within the Sydney local were more isolated from those in other locals. They were deprived of potential coordinators and organizers of inter-local opposition. The lack of coordination and organization beyond the local level placed severe limitations on the ability of oppositional groups to change the policy and direction of the Canadian section of SWOC. Furthermore, existing left-wing political parties were increasingly unable to play a coordinating role. The purging of communists from the SWOC staff meant that the Communist Party of Canada was now limited in its ability to act as a coordinator or organizer of the dispersed opposition within SWOC. The CCF, on the other hand, had no interest in supporting rank-and-file opposition within the unions and was in fact dominated by unionists who used the union to build and finance the party.

In the 1936 to 1942 period, the opposition within SWOC had been born. However, by the end of that period the leaders of the opposition were largely contained within their respective locals and severely restricted in terms of their impact on national and international union policy. Some differences within the Sydney opposition over the questions of democracy, autonomy and militancy did not create competing hostile factions, but rather an accommodation by the most radical elements in the local. The purging of radical staff representatives and the dominance of the

national and international leadership were therefore assured. However, communists, independent radicals and left-wing CCF workers in the local continued to lead other steel workers in challenging both the national and international leadership and DOSCO.

Such changes within Local 1064 and SWOC were part of much larger developments, and were influenced by them, but the influence of these larger events were mediated by intra-union struggles. These conflicts concerned the different strategies and policies that were required to win "industrial democracy" in the face of company attacks and government intransigence. They touched on issues of democracy and autonomy within Local 1064 and the entire Canadian section of SWOC.

The high level of democracy and militancy within the local made a difference in terms of resisting what Michels terms oligarchy. But the oppositionists within the local were only partially successful at resisting oligarchical tendencies that were encouraged by the national and international leadership. The oppositionists' challenge to the established union leadership was undermined by the latter due to the power they wielded within the union, the structure which supported it and the divisions which appeared within the opposition itself. The union's limited type of democracy and increasingly bureaucratic way of operating simultaneously encouraged intra-union conflicts while restricting the potential of the opposition to change these features. In so doing, they facilitated the subsequent establishment of "responsible" unionism and undermined the fight for a more radical version of "industrial democracy".

CHAPTER V

THE ASCENDENCY OF "RESPONSIBLE" UNIONISM AND EMERGENCE OF "INDUSTRIAL DEMOCRACY", 1943 -1946

A) Introduction

From its inception in 1936 until 1945, all union positions in SWOC above the local level were filled by appointment rather than election, prompting one analyst to assert that "the steel workers centralized in haste and became legitimate at leisure."¹ Thereafter, regular elections were held to fill the top union positions and staff positions continued to be filled through appointment by the union's leading officials. The international convention became the supreme policy-making body, with the implementation of its decisions and the day-to-day activities overseen by the international executive in Pittsburgh and the various district directors. The union's international leadership, according to Ulman, continued to adhere to the philosophy and practice of centralized government, a feature which did not escape the criticism of the rank and file.²

In Canada, the annual National Wage and Policy Conference was the highest policy making body, but it could not decide on constitutional matters and it could not override any decision by the international convention. Significantly, the wage and policy meetings were referred to as conferences and not conventions. Each local in

¹ Lloyd Ulman, 1962, op. cit. p. 3.

² Ibid., pp. 23, 27-8.

Canada was allowed one representative at the national conference for the first 500 members or less, plus another representative for each additional 500 members or portion thereof. On average there were fewer than two members for each local attending the national conferences.³ The Canadian jurisdiction was divided into two districts: District 5 which included the Maritimes and Quebec, and District 6 which encompassed the whole of Ontario. These districts each had an elected director but held no regular meetings of representatives from the locals. Efforts by American steel workers to set up district councils which would meet regularly were successfully resisted by the union leadership.⁴ The districts in Canada were divided at one time into area councils, but they were later dissolved by the leadership.⁵ The local was the basic unit within the union since it allowed direct input by the general membership. The common practice was for locals to hold weekly meetings.⁶

Having purged communists from leadership positions above the local level and set up a formally democratic structure, the union leadership turned its full attention on winning concessions from the employers and government. In his history of the Canadian labour movement, Craig Heron observed that many Canadian workers made a breakthrough in their organizing efforts during World War II due to the increased

³ See the Proceedings of the National Wage and Policy Conferences, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁴ Lloyd Ulman, 1962 *op. cit.*, p. 37.

⁵ USWA National Wage and Policy Conference, Toronto, February 14-5, 1947, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁶ See USWA Local 1064 Minutes.

demand for goods and the labour to produce them. All three labour centrals, the Trades and Labour Congress (TLC), the All Canadian Congress of Labour (ACCL) and the Committee for Industrial organization (CIO), were able to significantly increase their memberships after 1940. The increases in union organizing and strike activity, according to Heron, marked a "deeply felt commitment of thousands of Canadian workers not to return to the economic insecurity of the 1930's."⁷ They demanded union recognition, higher wages and other improvements despite the wage and price controls that were imposed at the beginning of the war and the restrictive labour legislation that was extended to all war-related industries that were considered "essential".⁸

As for the steel industry, Craig Heron and Robert Storey have argued that there were three key features about the unionizing effort of Canadian steel workers in the early 1940's. First was the social complexion of the "union enthusiasts". They came mainly from the ranks of the most skilled steel workers and were usually communists or social democrats who were committed to radically reforming or transforming capitalist society.⁹ As we have seen in the previous chapter, most of the prominent union activists were indeed associated with either the CCF or the CPC. The first local 1064 executives of the late 1930's and early 1940's included

⁷ Craig Heron, 1989, op. cit., pp. 77-78.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ C. Heron and R. Storey, "Work and Struggle in the Canadian Steel Industry, 1900-1950", in On the Job: Confronting the Labour Process in Canada, C. Heron and R. Storey (eds.), Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1986, p. 232.

communists, such as George MacEachern, Norman MacKenzie and Palmer Robson, and social democrats, such as Carl Neville, Dan MacKay and James Nicholson.¹⁰

The political differences among them created some tensions, but these differences did not prevent the organizing of Sydney steel workers. The alliance of communists and social democrats, though uneasy at times, was maintained and continued to be a crucial factor in the effort to win industrial democracy.¹¹

Two other characteristics of unionizing within the Canadian steel industry were the economic climate of World War II with its high demand for labour, and the political climate in which workers were being asked to sacrifice for the war effort and the struggle for democracy. Steel workers transformed the wartime rhetoric about fighting for democracy into demands for "industrial democracy", according to Heron and Storey, and "ultimately pushed the Canadian state into a new activist role in industrial relations."¹² However, the vision of industrial democracy held by the union was a limited one, according to them, since it never "questioned the employers' right to control work routines." The union wanted an industrial administration in the plants that was "inherently fair and which assured a level of economic security for steelworkers." Essentially what it advocated was "a further bureaucratization of workplace relations - in effect, the creation of a 'rule of law' within the steel plants"

¹⁰ SWOC Local 1064, Election results, 1937-1970, Beaton Institute.

¹¹ According to Michael Earle (1990, op. cit.) the cooperation between the two groups of workers during "the united front period" was a decisive factor in successfully organizing the steel workers.

¹² C. Heron and R. Storey, Op. cit., pp. 232-33.

to replace the arbitrary rule of employers.¹³

This chapter offers qualified support for Heron and Storey's argument. The qualifications are important ones in that they attempt to explain more fully the kinds of struggles that were waged in the name of industrial democracy, as well as the reasons this specific form of industrial democracy emerged in Canada. More needs to be said about the varying perceptions of and expectations about industrial democracy that were held by elements within the union. Many militants and radicals within the locals declared themselves in favour of industrial democracy, but they also opposed the bureaucratization of union-employer relations insofar as it restricted their ability to take action in the workplace. The analysis in this chapter of the 1943 and 1946 strikes and the events surrounding them suggests that there were competing views about what industrial democracy should bring to the industry and the union as well as the workplace. It is not entirely accurate to suggest, as do Heron and Storey, that the union never questioned the employers' right to control the labour process. Elements within the rank and file, led by radicals and militants, did demonstrate their opposition to "management's rights". It was the national and international leadership of the union that pushed the membership toward compromise and accommodation on this issue.

Establishing a routinized and bureaucratized relationship between employer and union representatives necessitated that union leaders restrict the activities of radical and militant elements within the union, because the latter demanded a less restrictive

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

relationship with the employer as well as a more militant position on various issues. Also problematic from the perspective of the national and international leadership was the greater worker solidarity and more democratic union structures and processes that were advocated by these same elements. The bureaucratization of employer-union relations in the basic steel industry was therefore predicated on the bureaucratization of relations between the union leadership and the union rank and file. These two interrelated processes within the steel industry had their own particular pace and political colouration, but as Moody has argued, a similar development occurred within many unions in the immediate post-war period.¹⁴

The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate that the "new activist role in industrial relations" played by the Canadian state in the steel industry was very much a response to the mobilization of the steel workers. However, this intervention was also shaped somewhat by the diverse ideological and political currents within the Canadian union movement and, in particular, the steel workers' union itself. The antagonism and suspicion directed toward labour leaders by state and government representatives initially extended to moderate union leaders. But, state representatives' abhorrence of communist and radical unionists, and the more militant direction they advocated was of even greater concern. State intervention into worker-employer relations could not be separated from concerns about the relations within unions. The recognition of the union by the employers and the state was due essentially to the militancy of the steel workers, but it was also premised on the ability of the union's

¹⁴ Kim Moody, *op. cit.*, 1988.

leadership to mediate between the workers and the employers in a way that won the workers' consent to labour under conditions that were also acceptable to the employer. In Gramscian terms, "consent" was brokered by union leaders, resulting in compromise which left capitalist hegemony unchallenged.¹⁵ Achieving such consent required minimal membership mobilization and the presentation of a particular "compromise" as the best that was possible. However, this compromise was often rejected by some rank-and-file workers and opposition leaders who disputed its terms. They desired a more favourable compromise which was underpinned by a more democratic version of industrial democracy and a more effective unionism.

B) The 1943 Steel Strike

Organizing had been proceeding unevenly in the Canadian basic steel industry. The Sydney and Sault Ste. Marie locals were well organized and even had signed contracts with DOSCO and Algoma, unsatisfactory though they were. Hamilton's local 1005, on the other hand, had not yet managed to organize the majority of STELCO workers and was not recognized at all by the company. Organized or not, steel workers throughout the basic steel industry faced difficult conditions. Most of them were working 48 or more hours per week under unhealthy and dangerous conditions for wages which had not nearly kept pace with the rise in the cost of

¹⁵ See Frank R. Annunziato (1988, op.cit.) for an elaboration of this perspective.

living. At DOSCO over 30% of steel workers laboured 56 hours a week ¹⁶

The new initiative taken by the USWA leadership did not include a plan to mobilize the union membership. Instead, President Philip Murray announced that he would meet with government and industry in Canada to see "what can be done voluntarily by the forces of industry and labour and government jointly to prevent stoppages of work in our defence and war program."¹⁷ The principal outcome of these talks was a government commission (the Barlow Commission) to study the matter. The talks also resulted in the union's application to the National War Labour Board on behalf of Local 2251 at Algoma and Local 1064 at Sydney. The goal of this strategy was to have the locals' respective industries recognized as "national" industries which would strengthen the union's case for eliminating wage inequalities between the three major plants. In their application, the locals also asked for adjustments in wages which would provide for a minimum base wage of 55 cents an hour and a cost of living bonus, a standard 48-hour week and mechanisms for building better labour-management relations.¹⁸ The union's "Central Committee" for basic steel negotiations, composed of the Canadian Director, the two District Directors and representatives from each of the basic steel locals, assured the Minister

¹⁶ SWOC Conference on Basic Steel, Ottawa, Dec 3-5, 1941, MG 28 I 268, NAC. These long hours were in part a result of the high demand for steel during World War II. But, the 48 hour week was standard within the steel industry and overtime was not paid at Dosco for any of these hours.

¹⁷ Millard to all SWOC Staff and Central Committeemen, Dec 17, 1941, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹⁸ Application of USWA locals 2251 and 1064 to National War Labour Board, Basic Steel Correspondence, 1941-2, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

of Labour that a positive decision on the applications would "contribute materially in establishing better industrial relations and in hastening a successful conclusion to the war."¹⁹

The union memberships at both the DOSCO and Algoma plants were becoming increasingly angry with the lack of progress being made through this process because the steel companies refused to negotiate on any of the major issues. It was reported at one USWA conference that the union had made no recent progress with DOSCO except to be assured that women working at the plant would be paid the same wages as men doing the same work.²⁰ However, even this concession necessitated persistent efforts by the union, since the company was paying women in the Mechanical Department only 43.5 cents an hour instead of the 50 cents which was paid to the men. The possible lowering of wages for the men and the company's all-too-ready tendency to displace men with women threatened both wage levels and seniority rights.²¹

As a means of gaining leverage with the government and employers and in

¹⁹ Central Committee, USWA Canada to Humphrey Mitchell, January 12, 1942, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

²⁰ Report of USWA Delegates to CCL Convention, Ottawa, September 13, 1942, MG 28 I 268, NAC. The production workers in the Canadian steel industry were all men during the period under study, except for women who worked in steel production during World War II.

²¹ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, Dec 9, 1942. Other complaints were made by male workers who claimed that women couldn't do the manual work required and that "the men were carrying the women". It was also stated that seniority in the Yard department had ceased to exist entirely with the coming of the women. See USWA Local 1064 Minutes, April 28, 1943.

particular influencing the recommendations of Barlow's commission, the newly appointed Canadian Director of the USWA, Charles Millard, called for a strike vote at Sydney and Sault Ste. Marie in the summer of 1942. Activists at the two plants had been advocating this action for some time and demonstrated their readiness to confront the employers by voting 99% in favour of strike.²² The government's determination not to grant the wage demands, even in the face of the strike threat, was made clear by Prime Minister Mackenzie King when he stated: "If increases in wage rates are granted to steel workers at Sydney in violation of the order-in-council under the threat of strike, workers in other industries will take notice and threaten strike action to secure higher wages."²³

Despite the intransigence of government representatives and the steel companies, the Canadian Director of the USWA urged the presidents of the locals in Sydney and Sault Ste Marie to ensure that "every effort be made to continue operations at peak production levels" until a final decision was made by the Minister of Labour on the report of the Barlow Commission.²⁴ This was reluctantly accepted by Local 1064's militant president, George MacNeil, who announced that he was ready "to pull the pin in the event of the commission decision not being favourable in our demands".²⁵ In the face of such militancy, the Canadian Director was counting

²² Department of Labour, RG 27, Vol. 424, File 9, Strike File, NAC.

²³ King quoted in Millard to MacDonald, August 21, 1942, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

²⁴ Millard to E. Dalrymple and George MacNeil, December 22, 1942, MG 28, I 268, NAC.

²⁵ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, November 25, 1942.

on the paid staff and their influence on "a well-developed stewardship throughout the plants" which would hopefully maintain "restraint".²⁶

When the report of the Barlow Commission finally recommended against the application of the Algoma and Sydney locals, the immediate reaction of the steel workers was such that USWA staff representative William Mahoney warned the Canadian Director that, "[t]he membership is utterly disgusted and if we are not careful that feeling will be as strong towards us as it is towards the government and company."²⁷ On January 12, 1943, Sydney steel workers staged a "spontaneous walkout" and were immediately joined by steel workers at Algoma and Trenton, Nova Scotia.²⁸ The strike occurred so suddenly that the DOSCO plant's General Manager complained that no provisions were made by the union for maintenance of the furnaces: "The men just walked out. The company received no notification whatsoever from the union regarding the strike."²⁹ Once the strike was in progress, the Canadian Director voiced his support for it, but President Murray and the

²⁶ Millard to J.S. Hessian, December 22, 1942; Millard to Forman Waye, December 22, 1942, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

²⁷ Mahoney to Millard, January 5, 1943; Local Union 1064 Executive to All Members of Local 1064, May 5, 1943, MG 28 I 268, NAC. The report only offered a recommendation that the companies pay time and a half for the seventh consecutive day of work.

²⁸ Hessian to Millard, January 12, 1943, MG 28 I 268, NAC. The USWA local in Trenton, Nova Scotia had also made application to the National War Labour Board.

²⁹ Department of Labour, Strike File, RG 27, Vol. 424, File 9, NAC. However, the claim that the action was completely spontaneous is questionable given that the day prior to the strike Local 1064's President stated that the union membership is "100 percent behind a stoppage."

international leadership were very disturbed by the event. They immediately appointed two international USWA representatives, as well as Pat Conroy of the Canadian Congress of Labour, to meet with government officials in an attempt to find a speedy settlement.³⁰

The threat to wartime steel production resulted in Prime Minister King becoming personally involved in these talks. After discussions with the union representatives, King suggested that if the workers ended the strike the National War Labour Board would look more sympathetically at the union's demands.³¹ Initially the President of Local 1064 and other members of the central bargaining committee were not willing to accept this offer.³² But King apparently had the full support of the international office of the union and reminded the Canadian Director that the strikes did not have the authorization of the international union headquarters.³³ Millard then immediately intervened with the local leadership to have them bring an end to the strike action.³⁴

The agreement struck between the union and the government was not very satisfactory from the perspective of many workers, especially for those at the Trenton

³⁰ Murray to Mitchell, January 15, 1943, MG 28 I 268, NAC; Millard to all Officers and Members of Canada, January 13, 1943, MG 28 I 268, NAC; USWA Local 1064 Minutes, January 13, 1943.

³¹ King to Millard, January 21, 1943, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

³² USWA Local 1064 Minutes, January 20, 1943.

³³ King to Millard, January 21, 1943, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

³⁴ Millard to MacNeil, Dalrymple, and Patterson, January 23, 1943, MG 28 I 268, NAC; USWA Local 1064 Minutes, January 27, 1943.

plant who would be required to make a separate application to the National War Labour Board. Since this implied that the Trenton plant was not considered part of the basic steel industry, the Trenton local's membership decided that a "[r]eturn to work at this time would be betrayal of local 1231" and "cause a split in the united solidarity shown thus far by the United Steel Workers of America."³⁵ Their refusal to return to work was supported by the Sydney workers who sent a resolution to the union's international leadership requesting that the Trenton plant remain part of the basic steel industry.³⁶

The Canadian Director became fully committed to the MacKenzie King proposal and urged the President of Local 1064 to press for its acceptance by the membership: "Like representatives of [the] International Board I am most strongly advising and urging you to recommend that settlement be accepted at once as representing all that can be expected at [the] present time." He also urged acceptance despite the problems with the "language in original document which government for its own reasons felt necessary to retain".³⁷ Apparently the Canadian Director was asking the workers to accept a deal that needed clarification and to accept the word of Prime Minister King that the National War Labour Board would look more positively at their application once the workers had ended the strike and reapplied to the Board.

The workers at both Algoma and DOSCO reluctantly voted to return to work,

³⁵ USWA Local 1231 Executive to Millard, N. D., MG 28 I 268, NAC; USWA Local 1231 Executive to Millard, January 24, 1943, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

³⁶ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, January 27, 1943.

³⁷ Millard to MacNeil, January 25, 1943, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

but only on the understanding that they would strike again in 30 days if substantial progress was not made in resolving the outstanding issues.³⁸ The local leaders at Sydney also made it clear that they were disappointed with the union's international leaders who brought about the termination of the strike. They accomplished this by indicating to the local leadership that no further financial assistance would be forthcoming from the international office if the strike persisted.³⁹ This prompted the editor of the Steelworker to state the need for a local strike fund. The international office had been reported to be contributing \$18,000 in strike relief, but that amount was reduced and made available only to workers with the largest and neediest families.⁴⁰ The Local 1064 executive also did not escape criticism by the Steelworker for succumbing to the "wiley weasel words" and "chloroforming seductions" of the government. The editorial claimed that while the rank and file had "insisted on striking", the local executive followed the lead forced upon it by the workers, and the "high command" did "all it could to stop the strike."⁴¹

While some accounts and analyses of the strike do not explore the role of the

³⁸ MacNeil to Millard, January 26, 1943, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

³⁹ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, January 27, 1943.

⁴⁰ Steelworker, February 27, 1943; USWA Local 1064 Minutes, January 27, February 10, 1943.

⁴¹ Steelworker, February 27, 1943.

international leadership in ending the strike, it was crucial.⁴² What these accounts suggest is that the settlement was only a result of conflict and negotiation between labour and capital. What they ignore is the intra-union conflict and divisions within the union itself, in particular, the differences between the international leadership and much of the membership in the locals. These differences were mediated by national union leaders with the assistance of moderate leadership in the locals.

C) Legalistic and Bureaucratic Approaches Versus Direct Rank-and-File Action

Two months after the strike ended, there was still no progress in resolving the issues; yet strike action had not resumed as was promised. Members of the Sydney local passed a resolution expressing bewilderment about "the jumbled state of affairs" and the fact that they were not provided with information on the negotiations and Board hearings.⁴³ It was reported to the Canadian Director that the Sydney workers were becoming so angry that absenteeism was prevalent and that "[i]f delay lasts much longer there may be another complete work stoppage."⁴⁴ The national leadership and staff did everything possible, however, to prevent another walkout. They argued that such action by the workers would jeopardize a favourable response

⁴² The role of the international leadership was not mentioned by Laurel Sefton MacDowell in her account of the strike. See Laurel Sefton MacDowell, "The 1943 Steel Strike Against Wartime Controls", Labour/Le Travail, No. 10 (Autumn) 1982, pp. 65-85. Nor was it referred to by Heron and Storey in their examination of changes within the industry in the 1940's. See C. Heron and R. Storey, 1986, op. cit.

⁴³ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, March 10, 1943.

⁴⁴ MacNeil to Millard March 26, 1943, MG 28 I 268, NAC; Hessian to Millard, March 29, 1943, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

from the National War Labour Board.⁴⁵

When the War Labour Board finally rejected the union's application for national status and a 55-cent base rate for steel workers at Sydney and Algoma, the Canadian Director felt personally betrayed since he had been assured by the Prime Minister that the Board would decide in favour of the workers. The only concession that the union received was a very small increase in the base rate.⁴⁶ However, despite this rejection by the Board, Millard did not call immediately for strike action. Instead, he asked for a membership referendum on whether to accept or reject the report, but he also instructed the locals that the national executive should be given the opportunity to pressure the government to fulfil its original promise before any strike action was taken.⁴⁷

Because unrest among Sydney Steel workers was reported to be "rampant", Millard impressed upon the international headquarters in Pittsburgh the urgent need for their assistance in negotiating with Ottawa.⁴⁸ The intervention by the international office was not welcomed by some workers, however, who complained at one local union meeting that "we seemed to be held up by our international Rep's (sic)." But most of their anger was directed at the Canadian Director, who was

⁴⁵ Laurel Sefton MacDowell, 1982, op. cit., p. 81.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 82-83.

⁴⁷ National Board's Decision in Basic Steel, March 31, 1943, MG 28 I 268, NAC; Millard to Dalrymple, April 1, 1943, MG 28 I 268, NAC; USWA Local 1064 Minutes, April 7, 1943.

⁴⁸ Millard to Murray, April 13, 1943, MG 28 I 268, NAC; Millard to Louis St. Laurent, April 27, 1943, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

criticized by one member as "only interested in this union sending delegates to conferences and we should tell him to stop fucking around and get some action or resign." Some members at the meeting wanted a motion of censure against Millard, but this was rejected by others who argued that such action would serve no useful purpose since the real obstacle was the government.⁴⁹

When the Board's report was finally voted on, it was soundly rejected by the membership of the Sydney and Trenton locals who then called for immediate action to win their demands.⁵⁰ In an attempt to contain membership militancy, the Canadian Director visited the Trenton, Sydney and Algoma locals and proposed that he and other union officers continue to press government officials and labour boards for a favourable decision.⁵¹ Millard took a tough stand against the state officials in the subsequent hearings, having already been completely out-manoeuvred by them and severely criticized for it. While local 1064 representatives were somewhat impressed with his performance, they continued to be disappointed with the two representatives from the Pittsburgh office, who put no pressure on government and made "no threats" concerning what the USWA leadership might do to support Canadian workers.⁵²

The Canadian Director subsequently came under attack for purportedly

⁴⁹ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, April 14, 1943.

⁵⁰ MacNeil to Millard, April 29, 1943, MG 28 I 268, NAC; Alfonso Murray to Millard, May 4, 1943, MG 28 I 268, NAC; Nicholson to Millard, May 12, 1943, MG 28 I 268, NAC; MacNeil to Millard, May 21, 1943, MG 28 I 268, NAC; USWA Local 1064 Minutes, April 7, 1943.

⁵¹ Millard to all locals, April 5, 1943, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁵² USWA Local 1064 Minutes, April 7, 1943.

lowering the union's demands, and a letter of protest was sent to Millard.⁵³ This charge was based on his report on current talks with the government. But Millard had his defenders within the Sydney local who argued that the main problem was that representatives from the international office "took the reins out of C. H. Millard's hands."⁵⁴ The differing views among local activists on whether to blame Millard, the international leadership, or both, undermined attempts to push for more militant action.

One of Millard's leading critics was the President of the Sydney local, George MacNeil, who stated in a telegram to Millard: "Membership fed up with dilatory action your office past month."⁵⁵ This was followed by another telegram on behalf of the local stating that, "[a]fter repeated abortive attempts to secure action from your office...our membership is determined that no further time be lost in presenting and concluding this case."⁵⁶ It is noteworthy that there was no mention of rank-and-file dissatisfaction recorded in the proceedings of the Wage and Policy Conference, although it was certainly raised by the Sydney delegates. Undoubtedly, the vast majority of steel workers at Sydney and Algoma was ready and perhaps even anxious to strike. However, Millard and other union officials were resisting strike action in the hope that the state would eventually intervene on the side of the union and reverse

⁵³ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, April 28, 1943.

⁵⁴ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, May 12, 1943.

⁵⁵ MacNeil to Millard, June 15, 1943, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁵⁶ McQueen to Millard, January 6, 1944, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

its previous decisions.

As talks among national union leaders, employers and state representatives continued, Sydney steel workers confronted DOSCO by carrying out sporadic department-wide job actions. In 1943, there were at least three such stoppages over a number of issues, and in 1945 and early 1946, another series of such actions occurred. Coke oven workers, machinists, electrical workers, ore loaders, bricklayers and open hearth workers all downed tools for brief periods.⁵⁷ The most important of these conflicts involved the coke oven workers and electrical repair workers. The former initiated a "slow-down" which began in early 1944 when the company reduced the size of the crew on the coke ovens' batteries.⁵⁸ The men ended their job action on the advice of the local executive, who were pressured to intervene by the national leadership. The Canadian Director's rationale for ending the slow-down was that, "we are always in a better position to win a satisfactory settlement of our grievances when we act strictly in accordance with our agreements."⁵⁹

The workers remained highly combative and encouraged by the high demand for steel which persisted as the war came to an end. However, despite these favourable conditions, the international and national leadership refused to use strike action as leverage against the companies and the government. Canadian steel workers

⁵⁷ Department of Labour, Strike File, T-3027, RG 27, Vol. 423, File 366; Department of Labour, Labour Gazette, Vol. 45, 1945, pp. 400, 402, 1389, 1579, 1727; Vol. 46, 1946, p. 245; Steelworker, February 2, 1946.

⁵⁸ Local 1064 Correspondence and Reports, Nicholson to Millard, January 27, 1944, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁵⁹ Millard to Nicholson, January 31, 1944, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

had not given a no-strike pledge as they had in the United States, but the Canadian Director still was concerned with "guard[ing] the public interest by maintaining uninterrupted production of steel in war time."⁶⁰ He could probably count on a sympathetic hearing from some workers on this issue, including communist activists, who were concerned with the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union, and CCF members, who were politically allied to Millard. Nonetheless, many workers felt that they had sacrificed more than enough already in aid of the war effort, and they were determined to reach their objectives.

When coke oven workers later resumed the slow-down in June 1946 in opposition to further "efficiency measures" and the inaction by the War Labour Board, the executive once more pressed them to return to full production. However, this time the workers defied the leadership by voting overwhelmingly not to resume full production.⁶¹ The defiance by the steel workers greatly distressed the leadership who were left to ponder their inability to control the union membership. Acting District Director Forman Waye lamented to Millard that "[t]his is a case where if we had union security we could discipline the men involved but with the company trying to smash the union we can only go so far in that direction."⁶² Millard's immediate concern was that such job action was threatening national negotiations as well as

⁶⁰ Report of Charles Millard, National Director, July 14, 15, 1945, MG 19, 7; Beaton Institute.

⁶¹ Millard to Nicholson, N. D. (Circa Early 1946), MG 28 I 268, NAC; M.M. MacLean to Millard, June 17, 1946, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁶² Waye to Millard, June 19, 1946, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

production and employment at the Sydney plant.⁶³ Because the slow-down reduced the supply of coke it was said to be putting men in the Blast Furnace Department out of work, and on these grounds, the local executive asked the coke oven workers to resume normal production. The workers continued their action, insisting that the high production levels required that more workers be hired.⁶⁴

The strike by the electrical repair workers in May 1946 was a complete stoppage of work rather than a slow-down. They struck after the company effectively reduced their pay by decreasing their hours from 60 to 48 per week, as well as refusing overtime pay for work performed on Sundays and holidays.⁶⁵ The strike was a clear demonstration of the high level of solidarity among the steel workers. It lasted approximately four weeks and was supported financially by the contributions of other steel workers who also refused to do any work normally done by the strikers. Fourteen hundred dollars was collected in support of the strikers and another \$1600 was provided in strike relief from the local union account. Apparently, there was no financial assistance from the international.⁶⁶ The strike was settled on "satisfactory terms" according to the Post Record.⁶⁷ The unqualified support for this strike by the local and even national leaders was due to the company's actions, which had

⁶³ Millard to Corbett, July 4, 1946, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁶⁴ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, June 5, 12, 19, 1946.

⁶⁵ Steelworker, May 11, 1946.

⁶⁶ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, May 29, 1946.

⁶⁷ Post-Record (Sydney), May 4, 20, 21, 25, 1946.

dramatically changed the wages received by electrical workers. Furthermore, the strike did not threaten to drastically reduce or completely halt steel production as did the job action by coke oven workers. It also may have been the case that the status of electricians as highly skilled and better paid workers mitigated against any strong intervention by the leadership.

The actions taken by the workers contrasted sharply with the national and international leadership's reliance on legalistic and bureaucratic means. The participation in seemingly endless state-sponsored hearings and negotiations continued to be pursued despite the absence of results. When the Sydney local's application for a redressing of wages and other outstanding issues was again denied by the Nova Scotia Regional War Labour Board, the union immediately appealed the decision to the National War Labour Board with the aid of legal counsel.⁶⁸ The long delays by the Board in reaching decisions produced frantic appeals by Millard for expediency since "[t]he situation at both Sault Ste. Marie and Sydney is getting too tense for comfort".⁶⁹

Apparently one of the major issues being discussed in the hearings was the productivity of the Sydney plant and its workforce. In an attempt to influence the Board, Millard assured its members that he "was fully aware that the union, especially in Sydney, must undertake a forthright plan of production record

⁶⁸ Jolliffe to Millard, November 25, 1944, MG 28 I 268, NAC. Ed Jolliffe, the counsel hired by the national union leadership, was also leader of the CCF in Ontario.

⁶⁹ Millard to W.H. Ley, January 22, 1945, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

improvement". In other words, that economies must be made. However, he argued that some wage equality between the plants was needed first, since "it is virtually impossible for leadership, either national or local, to do certain things as long as large numbers of the men are being discriminated against."⁷⁰ Millard and other leaders were serious enough about the efficiency issue to sponsor a resolution at the 1945 Canadian USWA policy conference stating that "[t]he steelworkers must insist on production efficiency whether or not the inefficiency occurs on the part of management or labour." According to the USWA District Director, the local 1064 executive believed "that the chief reason for the high cost of production at the plant there [Sydney] is that the company has been carrying a surplus of approximately 1000 men, most of whom are members of our union." He pointed out that if the union pushed for reductions in the workplace, "the whole of local 1064 would be in jeopardy."

Algoma steel workers were finally awarded an increased basic wage rate by the Board, but Sydney steel workers were denied it because DOSCO claimed that it could not afford to pay the increase. During a visit to Sydney just after the decision was announced, Millard admitted in a radio broadcast to the community that twenty-nine months of negotiations with the government had failed to achieve real gains for Sydney steel workers.⁷¹ Not unexpectedly, dissatisfaction with Millard was clearly

⁷⁰ Millard to W.H. Ley, January 22, 1945, MG 28 I 268, NAC; Millard to Archibald, May 19, 1945, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁷¹ Press release by C.H. Millard, Sydney, May 30, 1945, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

expressed in the first election of the national leaders of the union. Local 1064 President George MacNeil teamed up with STELCO radical Tom McClure to run against Millard and District 6 Director Mitchell.⁷² They attacked Millard and Mitchell for their "shamefully insignificant" accomplishments and the establishing of "the largest union staff in Canada.... the majority of whom are political appointees". The oppositionists also blamed them for the union's lack of democracy and its financial support of the CCF, which they argued went against the union's policy of non-partisanship. In response to these charges, Millard and Mitchell associated themselves closely with President Murray's name. Furthermore, they attacked the opposition for serving "outside interference", specifically the Labour Progressive Party, the name of the then illegal Communist Party of Canada. The election results showed a clear Ontario-Nova Scotia split on whom the steel workers wanted as their national leader. While MacNeil received the overwhelming support of District 5 steel workers, the larger number of steel workers in Ontario ensured Millard's and Mitchell's victory.⁷³

With no decisive action being taken to resolve the outstanding issues, the local union leadership also suffered a loss of credibility among some steel workers. A letter to the Steelworker from "A Disillusioned Liberal" claimed that local 1064 was losing its prestige among steel workers for not defending them against company charges of

⁷² The District 5 (Atlantic) Director, Stan Hessian, had been replaced temporarily by Forman Waye, but no election was held for the position.

⁷³ International Elections, Pamphlets and results, 1945, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

absenteeism when they refused to work more than five consecutive shifts.⁷⁴ Another letter to the Steelworker from "Bar-mill" also charged the union with collaboration over the issue of lay-offs and absenteeism.⁷⁵ In response to these charges the local's Union News claimed the union was active in fighting firings at the plant for absenteeism.⁷⁶

In anticipation of upcoming local union elections, "[a]nother laborer" argued that the steel workers' struggle must be entrusted to "a class conscious union executive" rather than executive members who socialize with DOSCO officials and take unnecessary trips to conventions in the United States. He urged the steel workers to "[c]omb the plant for prospective candidates" in the upcoming union election.⁷⁷ However, these criticisms were not necessarily directed against all members of the executive equally. The editor of the Steelworker distinguished local President George MacNeil from the other executive members and appealed to the steel workers to vote for him in the upcoming elections: "George is an honest, conscientious man with a cool head on his shoulders and will fight for his union principles. He'll be hard to swerve from his purpose and he cannot be bought."⁷⁸

Petitioning governments and avoiding negative public reaction continued to be

⁷⁴ Steelworker, January 12, 1946.

⁷⁵ Steelworker, January 19, 1946.

⁷⁶ Union News, February 13, 1946, MG 19, 7, d2f2, Beaton Institute.

⁷⁷ Steelworker, May 4, 1946.

⁷⁸ Steelworker, January 27, 1945.

the central thrust of the national leadership's strategy. Remarkably, this strategy was being promoted at a time when the union was being shunned and manipulated by both the companies and the state and when much of the rank and file was calling for militant action. Millard persisted in this strategy even as he admitted privately that the provincial and federal governments and the company were in collusion.⁷⁹ Such a strategy fit very well with the passive approach of the national and international leadership to educating and involving the membership in union affairs.

The national union leadership continued its course of consultation and lobbying with state representatives, but it could not ignore the increasing dissatisfaction within the locals. The Canadian Director pressed federal politicians and state bureaucrats to expedite the processing of union applications to the war labour boards so as to relieve the tension at Sydney, which he feared would "find expression in negative action."⁸⁰ Finally, as a way of pressuring government and managing tensions in the local, the Canadian Director requested a motion from the Sydney local asking "the national office to take necessary action."⁸¹

However, this approach did not meet with the approval of militants within the locals since it outlined no concrete plan for action. Canadian steel workers were also eager to confront the steel companies since the steel workers in the American basic

⁷⁹ Millard to Nicholson, June 20, 1945, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁸⁰ Millard to Mitchell, January 3, 1946, MG 28 I 268, NAC; Millard to A. MacNamara, February 7, 1946, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁸¹ Millard to Waye, February 18, 1946, MG 28 I 268, NAC; Waye to Millard, March 12, 1946, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

steel industry had just successfully struck and won union recognition along with an 18.5 cent wage increase.⁸² Union activist George MacEachern, who was now a member of the Trenton local, argued that "it seems that the boards have interpreted our patience as a sign of weakness and require a stronger approach than is provided by correspondence and debate." He urged that the wage demands be clarified and submitted to the locals for approval, that a strike vote of the entire membership be taken, that a national as well as local strike committee be formed and that a deadline be set for acceptance of union demands by the industry.⁸³

It was several months later that a strike vote was taken, resulting in a very strong mandate for strike action. The vote was 3,437 to 293 in favour of a strike at Sydney, while the Algoma vote was 3811 to 89 in favour of such action.⁸⁴ However, the Canadian Director was still not committed to a strike, and used the strike mandate only as a possible means of pressuring DOSCO to negotiate. This lack of resolve was treated with suspicion by militants and was criticized by them as weakening the union's position. As reports circulated that Millard was telling government that the workers would accept less than their current demands, Sydney steel workers demanded that he explain such reports.⁸⁵ At a meeting of the union's National Advisory Council, George MacEachern again argued that the union's demands were

⁸² Millard to Hessian, February 22, 1946, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁸³ MacEachern to Millard, March 12, 1946, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁸⁴ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, April 24, May 8, 1946; Post-Record, May 9, 1946.

⁸⁵ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, May 8, 1946.

too low and that "the union was in a strong position and should set a deadline for mass action."⁸⁶

The Canadian Director finally visited the Sydney local and told the members that he was fully supportive of their demands but that he wanted to avoid a strike if at all possible. He apparently did not want to be seen by government representatives as encouraging strike action. This was evident when Millard told Sydney steel workers that it would be preferable if action were taken after he left Sydney, since Cawawa would think he was agitating for action."⁸⁷

Millard and other members of the leadership also moved to contain the strike by insisting that the only locals eligible to participate in the strike would be those with no contracts. This prevented the Trenton local from striking, although the membership had already voted 990 to 30 in favour of strike.⁸⁸ Ever playing the role of industrial statesman, the Canadian Director tried to lead the workers and yet remain acceptable to employers and the government.

With the rejection of the union's final appeal to the National War Labour Board, the Canadian Director recommended that "a notice of strike deadline" be set for June 29, at which time if no progress was made, the government and the

⁸⁶ Proceedings of USWA National Advisory Council on Basic Steel, Toronto, June 9, 1946, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁸⁷ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, May 22, 1946.

⁸⁸ Proceedings of USWA National Advisory Committee, Toronto, June 29, 1946, MG 28 I 268, NAC; G.M. Dick to Millard, May 8, 1946, MG 28 I 268, NAC; Hugh Patterson to Millard, N. D., MG 28 I 268, NAC. Since they were denied the opportunity to strike, the Trenton local executive asked for assurances from Millard that they would benefit from supporting it by having any new contract won by the strike apply to them.

companies would be informed of the likelihood of a strike.⁸⁹ As another means of showing the steel workers' displeasure with the government, Millard was urged to also recommend that all labour representatives resign from labour boards. Millard made it clear, however, that the union would continue to cooperate with the Minister of Labour and Industrial Disputes Commissioner Roach, who had just been appointed to try to resolve the issues.⁹⁰

The June 29 deadline expired without a strike being called since the Canadian Director was "most anxious to avert strike action in steel."⁹¹ The Steelworker claimed "that Charlie Millard was going in for some fancy foot-work" by repeatedly postponing the strike date. It charged that brochures from the national office "to the moulders of Canadian opinion" offered to lower the demands of the union if companies could show that they could not afford the improvements asked by the union.⁹² Millard believed that the membership would settle for the 15.5 cent wage demand in "two instalments" and indicated to Deputy Minister of Labour MacNamara that he was prepared to recommend such a proposal to the union's National Advisory Committee. But he warned the state officials that if a strike did occur, he would revert to the union's original demand for \$33.40 for a 40-hour week plus other

⁸⁹ Millard to P. Baskin, May 28, 1946, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁹⁰ Report and Recommendations to the National Advisory Committee, June 9, 1946, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁹¹ Millard to Murray and McDonald, July 8, 1946, MG 28 I 268, NAC; Millard to Mosher and Conroy, July 8, 1946, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁹² Steelworker, July 6, 1946.

benefits.⁹³ This offer probably was not agreed to by the leadership of the locals, and it is possible that it was not even agreed to by the central negotiating committee.

The Canadian Director's covert activities were to no avail. The state and the employers rejected this proposal despite their eagerness to prevent a strike. In order to establish a pretence of state control of the industry the government had already appointed by Order-In-Council F. B. Kilbourn as comptroller of the steel industry with the assistance of three deputy comptrollers. In addition, the appointment of W.D. Roach as an industrial commissioner to investigate the industry and an offer of a 10-cent wage increase were designed to counter the movement towards a strike. This "offer" was reinforced by state intimidation in the form of threatened fines and imprisonment of workers.⁹⁴ The union defiantly rejected the offer as well as the threat and announced that the strike would begin at the Algoma and DOSCO plants on July 15. STELCO, which was not as well organized as the other two plants, remained an uncertainty and undoubtedly gave the government and the corporations hope that it could prevent a national strike in the basic steel industry.⁹⁵

Finally, more than three years after the aborted 1943 strike, workers in the basic steel industry struck for full recognition of their union and other basic demands

⁹³ Millard to A. MacNamara, N. D. (circa July 9), 1946, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁹⁴ Post-Record, July 13, 1946. The Order-In-Council allowed for fines of \$20 a day for employees who refused to carry out the orders of the comptroller, a maximum \$5,000 fine and imprisonment for five years for interference with the comptroller or his deputies, and \$500 and six months imprisonment for anyone interfering with an employee or counselling an employee to violate the Order.

⁹⁵ Steel Strike Bulletin, July 15, 1946, MG 28 I 268, NAC; Millard to MacDonald, July 15, 1946, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

related to wages, hours of work and other benefits. The efforts by the national and international leadership to avoid a strike gave way to the demands of militant oppositional leaders and the majority of steel workers. The leadership finally accepted the necessity of strike action. However, they remained determined to manage the strike in a way that would minimize its intensity and duration. Ironically, this approach was not only to undermine the combativeness and militancy of the workers, but arguably was also to extend the duration of the strike.

D) Managing the 1946 Strike

Local union elections just prior to the strike had produced a new president at Sydney, but also resulted in the reelection of some key incumbents.⁹⁶ Ed Corbett, a leader of the recent electrical workers' strike at the plant, replaced George MacNeil who had been the local union President for four years. Although he was not considered as radical as MacNeil and was viewed by Millard as more reliable than the latter, he was considered a militant unionist by most activists. Nonetheless, this change was a defeat of sorts for the oppositionists in that a key opponent of Millard was thus removed from the executive.

The new executive was united in its determination to win the strike and in fact welcomed it. According to one of the executive members, "The months of patient pleading are ended....The fruitless debate is over and the fight is on."⁹⁷ A high

⁹⁶ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, July 3, 1946.

⁹⁷ Halifax Chronicle, July 13, 1946.

degree of unity and militancy was also evident among the union membership as they greeted references to the Labour Minister's warnings about striking with "howls of laughter" and defiance. Union representatives pointed out that the steel companies recently had been allowed a \$5 per ton increase in the price of steel and that recent wage increases in meat-packing, farm implements, and the British Columbia logging industry had exceeded 10 cents an hour.⁹⁸

Some elements in the community looked upon the strike with trepidation as they recalled the 1923 steel strike "when city and company police manned the gates and barricades and beat back the mobs which tried to fight their way into the plant behind a barrage of rocks and slag."⁹⁹ But unlike the 1923 strike, where management prepared for the strike by recruiting "scabs", the management at Algoma and DOSCO ceased production completely. In return, the union's local leadership agreed to provide essential maintenance that would prevent permanent damage being done to the furnaces and soon after allowed the unloading of ships with ore for the plant.¹⁰⁰ While "[m]ass picketing, demonstrations of solidarity, action, every hour of every day" was supposed to be the core of the "union program", there was little evidence of such tactics.¹⁰¹ Instead, it was reported that music and sing-songs were the principal forms of excitement at gates, although on one occasion the workers

⁹⁸ Halifax Chronicle, July 13, 14 1946.

⁹⁹ Halifax Chronicle, July 16, 1946.

¹⁰⁰ Halifax Chronicle, July 25, 1946.

¹⁰¹ Halifax Chronicle, July 13, 22, 1946.

momentarily prevented DOSCO General Manager Anson from crossing the picket line.¹⁰² A central strike committee "numbering 300 members" coordinated the 4,303 strikers who were to picket in two-hour shifts at the various gates of the plant.¹⁰³ Another committee administered a welfare fund established to help needy families, while another specifically looked after problems related to the payment of rent and evictions.¹⁰⁴

Once DOSCO and Algoma were effectively struck, the national leadership informed the parliamentary Industrial Relations Committee that there was not the slightest possibility of the union accepting "anything less" than its present demand of a 15-cent hourly wage increase plus an extra five-cent differential for Sydney steel workers.¹⁰⁵ The membership at Sydney applauded this tough stand, feeling that they were in a good position to win such an increase given the high demand for steel.¹⁰⁶

Another factor in the strikers' favour was the strong support coming from the community. The Cape Breton Coal Miners took out full page advertisements in support of the steel workers as well as providing financial support.¹⁰⁷ The UMWA local at the Sydney Piers issued what the Post-Record called a "blank cheque" in

¹⁰² Halifax Chronicle, July 18, 1946; Post-Record, July 22, 1946.

¹⁰³ Post-Record, July 15, 16, 1946.

¹⁰⁴ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, July 31, 1946.

¹⁰⁵ Halifax Chronicle, July 19, 1946.

¹⁰⁶ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, July 31, 1946.

¹⁰⁷ Post-Record (Sydney), July 22, 1946.

support of the steel workers when it announced a levy on its members.¹⁰⁸ Even the Catholic parishes financially supported the strike.¹⁰⁹ A month after the strike began the workers had received almost \$6000 in support from other unions.¹¹⁰ The local chapter of the Labour Progressive Party stated that "[t]he whole community is seething with sympathy. The small business man, the professional man, the farmer, the worker outside the steel plant and the unemployed worker."¹¹¹ This was evident when thousands of residents including police, fire fighters and members of city council joined in the "greatest demonstration in Cape Breton History." The parade of support stretched over three miles in length, and about 15,000 people attended the rally which followed.¹¹²

The national leadership was careful to reject some of the support offered by trade unionists since it would tend to escalate the strike and possibly lessen the leadership's control of the situation. Therefore, when Toronto area USWA locals in the fabricating sector called for a strike to support the demands of the basic steel locals, Millard reminded these locals that the union's strategy was to strike only plants without existing collective agreements and have other locals provide financial

¹⁰⁸ Post-Record (Sydney), July 25, 1946.

¹⁰⁹ Post-Record (Sydney), July 22, 1946.

¹¹⁰ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, August 14, 1946.

¹¹¹ Post-Record (Sydney), July 10, 1946.

¹¹² Post-Record (Sydney), July 22, 1946.

support.¹¹³ When the leadership of the Maritime Marine Workers federation announced that its members would refuse any work at DOSCO unless the USWA approved of it and furthermore recommended that all workers in the allied trades join the steel workers on the picket lines in 10 days if no settlement was reached, the national leadership declined the offer of support.¹¹⁴ Rather than intensify the pressure against the government and the companies, the national union leadership remained on the defensive. When state representatives referred to the union's National Advisory Council as a "dictatorship" and an "oligarchy" for not holding a membership vote on the offer of a ten-cent increase, the Canadian Director offered more concessions which included only a 44-hour week rather than 40 hours and the 15.5 cents to be paid in three instalments instead of one.¹¹⁵

While these proposed concessions were welcomed by the parliamentary committee, the proposal received immediate criticism from other unions which were on strike or in negotiations. Automobile workers who were on strike for a 29-cent increase condemned the action.¹¹⁶ C.S. Jackson of the striking United Electrical Workers (UE) criticized Millard's offer as too low and stated: "It is surprising to us how the director of the steel union can make such an offer without consulting the rank

¹¹³ William Mackie to Millard, Aug 9, 1946, MG 28 I 268, NAC; Millard to Mackie, Aug 9, 1946, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹¹⁴ Post-Record (Sydney), July 19, 29, 1946.

¹¹⁵ Post-Record (Sydney), July 31, August 1, 2, 1946; Steel Strike Bulletin, August 9, 1946, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹¹⁶ Earl Watson to Millard, August 2, 1946, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

and file of the steel union."¹¹⁷ In an attempt to be supportive of the new proposal, even CCF Member of Parliament Clarie Gillis described it as "reasonable and very conservative."¹¹⁸ The offer apparently was not supported or approved by the local executives. This is suggested by the fact that local 1064 Secretary-Treasurer Nicholson stated to the press that he did not know the specifics of the offer and that the local was awaiting official word. Acting District Director Foreman Way attempted to assure the local membership that the national leaders were "sticking to their guns."¹¹⁹

The new initiative by Millard came to nothing when DOSCO insisted on its inability to pay for such a settlement.¹²⁰ Millard and the rest of the union's central committee responded by making yet further concessions. They offered to allow the issues of the cost-of-living-allowance, hours, vacation, overtime, the terms of union security and wage increases above ten cents to be decided in arbitration. In effect, only the first ten cents of the wage increase and the five-cent Sydney wage differential were to be awarded as a condition for ending the strike.¹²¹ This proposal went against the wishes of many Sydney steel workers, who insisted that they would win "on the picket line" and voiced their opposition against the use of arbitration as a way

¹¹⁷ Halifax Chronicle, August 2, 1946.

¹¹⁸ Post-Record, August 2, 1946.

¹¹⁹ Post Record (Sydney), August 3, 5, 1946; USWA Local 1064 Minutes, August 14, 1946.

¹²⁰ Post-Record, August 8, 1946.

¹²¹ Press release by USWA, August 15, 1946, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

of breaking the deadlock.¹²² It was probably because of such opposition that negotiations quickly broke off again.

The concessions proposed by the union's national leadership were perceived by many local activists to be primarily the result of Millard's influence. While union members did not publicly criticize him in the midst of the strike, the pages of the Steelworker undoubtedly reflected the views of some of them. A letter to the editor from "Inquirer" charged that Millard's leadership was "weak, wobbling and mischievous":

Did he not do his utmost to dampen the militancy of the steelworkers before the strike began? Did he not originally make demands far short of what the workers wanted? Did he have any authority from the workers to tell the House of Commons Industrial Relations Committee that they (the workers) would accept less than they are asking? Did he have any authority to say that in future the workers might agree to fore-go the use of the strike weapon and to accept compulsory arbitration? And did he have any authority to agree with the bosses that higher wages must mean higher prices? ¹²³

In his regular column, "Let's Face Facts," "Kentucky Colonel," the pseudonym for the left-wing intellectual J.C. Mortimer, undoubtedly had the Canadian Director in mind when he justified the practice of communists to "condemn union leaders when they think that these leaders are MIS-leaders."¹²⁴

In mid-August, the attention of Canadian steel workers became focused on

¹²² Halifax Chronicle, August 15, 16, 1946.

¹²³ Steelworker July 27, 1946.

¹²⁴ Steelworker, August 17, 1946.

STELCO's Hamilton plant, which was considered to be "the weak link" since the workforce there was divided and the company was using "scabs" to keep the plant in production.¹²⁵ The government also threatened to use police to break the Hamilton strike and to force a strike vote based on the government's latest offer.¹²⁶ This threat occasioned offers of assistance from other workers, including the organizing of a general strike. The possibility of a Canada-wide general strike was very real, because many union leaders had committed themselves to such a strike if the police were used against the STELCO strikers.¹²⁷ Acting USWA District Director Foreman Waye stated, "The temper of labour in the Maritimes is such that they are prepared to make the battle of the Hamilton strikers their own battle," and warned that a "spontaneous" general strike was a possibility.¹²⁸

Some militants such as the veteran radical miner and treasurer of the Cape Breton Labour Council, Bob Stewart, did not want to wait for the police to be used before calling a general strike. At the Labour Day rally in Sydney, which the Steelworker called the biggest in its history, he stated;

Never mind waiting for the policemen to attempt to smash the picket lines at Hamilton. Call a general strike. That's the policy of the Labour Council. Call a general strike and beat Mitchell and his gang.¹²⁹

¹²⁵ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, August 6, 1946.

¹²⁶ Post-Record, August 19, 1946.

¹²⁷ Post-Record (Sydney), August 28, 1946; Halifax Chronicle, August 23, 1946.

¹²⁸ Post-Record (Sydney), August 27, 1946.

¹²⁹ Post-Record (Sydney), September 3, 1946.

What added to the potential of a general strike was the fact that numerous workers in the textile, meat-packing, electrical and auto industries were already on strike at about this time. The strike wave was so widespread and intense that an editorial in the conservative Post Record commented that "Canada's production is being effectively sabotaged as if it were exposed to air bombardment."¹³⁰

With the STELCO strike holding and general support building for the union, government representatives put forward an offer of a 12.5-cent increase for lower paid workers and 11 cents for workers earnings over 95 cents an hour.¹³¹ They also proposed that the extra five-cent increase needed to bring Sydney's base wage rate up to that of Algoma's, and that STELCO's be decided after termination of the strike by the National War Labour Board which was still functioning although the war had ended. However, the issue of the extra five cents for Sydney steel workers was too important an issue to leave in the hands of a board. The Canadian Director asserted in a letter to MacKenzie King that it spoke to the principle of "Canadianism":

Our membership has consistently held that the union must not be a party to the establishment or continuation of one standard of living in British Columbia, a lower standard in Ontario and a still lower standard in Nova Scotia. We are striving for Canadian standards, not sectional standards, and we do not believe it would be good Canadianism to do otherwise.¹³²

Nonetheless, Millard agreed to put the government offer before the union's

¹³⁰ Post-Record (Sydney), August 17, 1946.

¹³¹ Post-Record (Sydney), August 31, 1946.

¹³² Millard to MacKenzie King, September 7, 1946, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

National Advisory Committee.¹³³ The offer then was put before the membership of the locals for a vote. This course of action carried a high degree of risk, because if STELCO workers accepted the offer, it would create serious divisions within the union and place great pressure on the other two locals. However, the offer was rejected by the STELCO workers as well as by those at Sydney and Sault Ste. Marie and clearly established the determination of the steel workers to win their demands.¹³⁴

Despite the overwhelming rejection of the offer, the Canadian Director apparently did not want to reduce the momentum in the negotiating process. He immediately indicated to the Minister of Labour that a slight revision of the offer, to include double time for statutory holidays, the elimination of the five-cent differential at Sydney, and the referral of other issues to arbitration, could meet with "majority approval."¹³⁵ Millard apparently wanted the specifics of this counter-offer to remain confidential, but as rumours of it began to circulate among Sydney steel workers, Acting District Director Waye had to assure them that the negotiating committee had not agreed to a compromise on wage rates.¹³⁶

Clearly, the national leadership had made further compromises without

¹³³ Proposal Submitted by Humphrye Mitchell, August 31, 1946, MG 28 I 268, NAC; Millard to MacKenzie King, September 1, 1946, MG 28 I 268, NAC; Millard to Mitchell, September 2, 1946, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹³⁴ Post-Record, September 9, 10, 1946.

¹³⁵ Millard to Mitchell, September 10, 1946, MG 28 I 268, NAC; Post-Record (Sydney), September 11, 1946.

¹³⁶ USWA Local 1964 Minutes, September 11, 1946.

consulting the rank and file. But the Canadian Director continued to insist publicly that the union would not retreat from the 15.5-cent demand.¹³⁷ When the President of the Algoma local questioned Millard about reports of the union negotiators accepting graduated wage increases, he denied it, but then stated that the "Government will see them as impractical once other issues are seen to be resolved."¹³⁸ Such manoeuvres were not publicly criticized by steel workers for fear of weakening the strike, but labour intellectuals close to the situation ridiculed Millard. "Roddie Rodd", whose poetry appeared regularly in the Steelworker, was one of those who satirized Millard:

Millard, the Muddled-headed,
Has muddled strikes too,
With all his "new proposals"
He keeps us in a stew
And simply sows confusion
Within the rank and file,
Who find it daily harder
His words to reconcile...¹³⁹

There was ample evidence that by this time the strike was having serious effects on industrial production in Canada. It was reported that trade experts were concerned about Canada's export markets, that manufacturers at home were coming to the end of their stock piles of steel and that scrap metal was even being imported

¹³⁷ Post-Record, September 13, 16, 1946.

¹³⁸ John Barker to Millard, September 12, 1946, MG 28 I 268, NAC; Millard to Barker, September 13, 1946, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹³⁹ Steelworker, September 28, 1946.

from Australia.¹⁴⁰ However, rather than use this and the union's solidarity as a lever to prevent the further erosion of union demands, the national leadership offered still more compromise. Millard announced yet another union proposal which called for a 10-cent increase retroactive to April 1 with the other 5.5 cents payable from the date of settlement, "the form of which to be the subject of negotiations." As well, "adequate assurance" from the government that the Sydney differential would be removed was now acceptable.¹⁴¹ The Canadian Director immediately wrote to Prime Minister King to obtain his support for the proposal and to ask him to pressure the companies for acceptance of it. Millard reminded him that the coal miners of Alberta had just won a 17.5-cent hourly increase.¹⁴²

The union's offer was attractive enough to the government and the employers that steel Comptroller Kilbourn countered with an offer of a 13-cent increase in two instalments and mediation on all other issues. Some "personal" assurance that the Sydney differential would be removed was also given.¹⁴³ On receiving this proposal, the national leadership immediately recommended to the membership of the three locals that they vote acceptance of the offer.¹⁴⁴ The response of many steel workers in Sydney to the proposal was negative, especially since the five-cent differential was

¹⁴⁰ Post-Record (Sydney), September 16, 1946.

¹⁴¹ USWA Press Release, September 17, 1946, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹⁴² Millard to MacKenzie King, September 18, 1946, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹⁴³ Kilbourn to Millard, September 27, 1946, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹⁴⁴ Millard to Reg Gardiner and George Wright, September 28, 1946, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

to be decided by the same Regional War Labour Board which had rejected their applications in the past. Local 1064 President Corbett stated that, "[t]his is worse than [the] previous offer", but the Canadian Director requested the "continued confidence and united acceptance [of] our recommendation".¹⁴⁵

A meeting of approximately 2,500 Sydney steel workers debated the proposed settlement. The pro-DOSCO Post-Record reported "some opposition to the proposals, which on the whole were well received by the gathering."¹⁴⁶ The next day, the membership in the three plants voted overwhelmingly in favour of the proposed settlement. However, while STELCO support was 20 to 1 and that of the Algoma steel workers 12 to 1, local 1064 members voted only 5 to 1 in favour of the proposal. This was still an overwhelming majority at the Sydney plant, yet almost 500 workers indicated their opposition to the agreement.¹⁴⁷ The length of the strike and the dissatisfaction of many workers with their leaders' lack of resolve appeared to be factors in the overwhelming vote to end the strike.

E) The Immediate Aftermath of the Strike

The ratification of the agreement did not result in an immediate return to work for Sydney steel workers. DOSCO insisted that the wage increase negotiated by state

¹⁴⁵ Corbett to Millard, September 29, 1946; Millard to Corbett, September 29, 1946, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹⁴⁶ Post-Record (Sydney), October 1, 2, 1946.

¹⁴⁷ Post-Record (Sydney), October 3, 1946; Steel Strike Bulletin, October 3, 1946, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

representatives was too high and refused to reopen the plant. This prompted Local 1064 president Ed Corbett to state that "now it is the company that is on strike and not the workers."¹⁴⁸ The local union leadership threatened to retaliate by withdrawing the maintenance men on the furnaces.¹⁴⁹ DOSCO officials conferred with Reconstruction Minister, C.D. Howe, about a subsidy to cover the cost of providing Sydney steel workers with the extra five-cent increase despite the fact that the company had been making profits between \$3 and \$5 million a year since 1937.¹⁵⁰ They also approached the government about support for plans to significantly reduce the workforce and make it more efficient, something which the Canadian Director had agreed with once an agreement was implemented.¹⁵¹

Having been assured of the five-cent subsidy, DOSCO resumed production, but it refused to staff the various departments at their former levels. This provoked the coke oven workers to resume the slow-down which had been in progress prior to the strike.¹⁵² While the slow-down was defended by ex-local president George MacNeil, it was seen by the executive as "not good for the union" since it interfered

¹⁴⁸ Post-Record (Sydney), October 5, 1946.

¹⁴⁹ Post-Record (Sydney), October 7, 1946.

¹⁵⁰ Correspondence, Basic Steel 1946, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹⁵¹ Millard to Kilbourn, October 15, 1946, MG 28 I 268, NAC. Post-Record (Sydney), October 8, 9, 1946.

¹⁵² Post Record (Sydney), October 12, 1946.

with production in other departments.¹⁵³ Finally, the union and the company agreed to implement the new "schedule for manpower" after a thirty-day resumption of normal operations. The local union executive agreed that there would be no further strikes or slow-downs and that the number of men hired at certain stages would be determined by "mutual consultation and consideration."¹⁵⁴ This arrangement was reinforced by steel Comptroller Kilbourn who made it clear that the subsidies being provided to DOSCO were made on the understanding that there would be greater efficiencies in production.¹⁵⁵ This meant that reductions in the workforce would have the full support of the state and that union leaders would be cooperating in implementing such measures.

Opposition to the new contract and how it was achieved was voiced by rank-and-file leaders. Their major criticism was that the union leadership had not mobilized and involved the membership to win their original demands. In his regular Steelworker column, "Kentucky Colonel" called the settlement "a sellout" and charged that the leadership "did nothing to strengthen the morale of the rank and file" and showed "a positive genius for muddlement (coupled and complicated with a love for secrecy)." But, perhaps their greatest offence, according to the editorial, was that

¹⁵³ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, October 16, November 27, 1946; Post-Record (Sydney), October 15, 16, 1946.

¹⁵⁴ Agreement between Union and Dosco, October 18, 1946, MG 28 I 268, NAC; USWA Local 1064 Minutes, October 23, 1946.

¹⁵⁵ Post-Record (Sydney), October 22, 1946. Union grievance men and departmental heads were to work out the implementation of the efficiency program through "mutual consultation and consideration." Post-Record (Sydney), October 25, 1946.

"[t]hey made poor use of the first-rate fighting material they had to work with." As a result, the workers "were virtually forced to surrender, and so surrender they did."¹⁵⁶

Some criticisms focused specifically on the role of the local leadership. A letter to the Steelworker by "Gyped" stated that the steel workers should join the United Mine Workers Union (UMWA), since the leaders of local 1064 are "only yes men to Millard". But, he added, "the steel workers in the eyes of the miners must look like ten-karat suckers to put up with such a faker as Chas. Millard, and maybe the miners would only consider them as a millstone around their necks."¹⁵⁷ In another letter, the same worker protested the "efficiency in operation" clause of the settlement, which he said smacked of "industrial fascism."¹⁵⁸ A letter from "Open Hearth Department" stated that the company was trying, with some success, to "capture" the union, and that consequently there was talk among the workers about joining the UMWA, a move which that particular worker thought would be greeted positively by the vast majority of steel workers.¹⁵⁹ Such charges were denied by the local union executive, and they urged the membership to ignore them.¹⁶⁰

Not all of the critics remained anonymous. Former local 1064 president

¹⁵⁶ Steelworker, October 12, 1946.

¹⁵⁷ Steelworker, October 19, 1946.

¹⁵⁸ Steelworker, November 2, 1946.

¹⁵⁹ Steelworker, November 16, 23, 1946.

¹⁶⁰ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, October 23, December 4, 1946.

MacNeil all but called Millard a traitor in a letter to the Post Record.

Of one thing I am certain... that the weak kneed, confusing and uncooperative leadership given by Millard during negotiations and the strike which followed, demands his removal as our national head....The strike was unnecessarily prolonged and the ultimate gain kept to a minimum by the wobbly, indecisive actions of C.H. Millard. It is also pretty well established that the present lay-offs on the Sydney plant are the result of the backstairs agreement this same man made with the company heads.¹⁶¹

Shortly after this letter appeared, Frank Smith, another militant steelworker criticized

Millard's role in the strike. According to him, it

would have been ludicrous had it not been attended with consequences very serious for the men involved....Our demands, which were quite modest in the first place, were at the instigation of Mr. Millard, reduced to what was comically referred to as the irreducible minimum....The morale of the men was never the same after.

Smith pointed out that the demand for the 40-hour week and retroactive pay on the differential was completely given up by Millard. The gains won in the strike were not "commensurate with our great rank-and-file effort," according to him, and if properly directed, the strike demands could have been won with "half the effort....if Mr. Millard's weak points had not been spotted by men much more astute than himself."¹⁶²

These letters certainly spoke for significant numbers of workers. According to

¹⁶¹ Post-Record (Sydney), November 27, 1946.

¹⁶² Post-Record (Sydney), December 5, 1946.

steel worker Frank Murphy, the strike was considered a failure by him and many other workers.¹⁶³ However, this was not the view of local and national union officials. When Millard visited the Sydney local, he did not point out the limitations of the agreement, but instead congratulated the steel workers "for their splendid demonstration of solidarity and unity."¹⁶⁴ Opposition to the new contract was also apparently undercut by the united front policy of the communists, as evidenced by Tim Buck's visit to the local where he applauded the victory and stated that "anyone who termed the award anything but a victory was not thinking in accord with facts."¹⁶⁵ This suggests the criticisms of the settlement were voiced mainly and most strongly by non-communist oppositionists. It also suggests that some tension might have developed between the communists and other oppositionists in the local over the assessment of the strike and how to respond to the established union leadership.

Another measure of the opposition to the Canadian Director and the contract he negotiated was the result of the election for national director in 1946. Although Millard easily won the majority of votes in Ontario, in the Sydney local he gathered only 14 votes more than the opposing candidate, Harold Padgett.¹⁶⁶ Padgett was not considered a militant or radical by the left opposition and had in fact been loyal to

¹⁶³ Frank Murphy, Interview, April 15, 1993.

¹⁶⁴ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, December 4, 1946.

¹⁶⁵ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, December 11, 1946.

¹⁶⁶ James Nicholson, a popular moderate from the Sydney local who was largely supportive of Millard, was elected by acclamation to the position of District 5 Director. Post-Record (Sydney), November 28, 1946.

Millard throughout most of his time as a staff person with the union.¹⁶⁷ Although Millard won the election, there were charges of intimidation voiced against some Millard supporters in Ontario.¹⁶⁸

Millard and other union leaders could deflect such criticisms by pointing to the concrete gains made in the strike. They also convincingly argued that the USWA had affirmed three principles in the strike: that base wages in the basic steel industry were to remain standard, that the basic steel industry must be treated as a single unit and that arbitrary decisions made independently of labour would not be effective and beneficial to the industry.¹⁶⁹ Furthermore, these gains had been won in a "responsible" manner whereby the union leadership had shown both a willingness to compromise and an unwavering commitment to abide by the contract. This adherence to "responsible" unionism was clearly demonstrated when Millard indicated that company penalties against steel workers who struck illegally after termination of the contract would be unopposed: "I do not see how we can consistently contend that we are opposed to wild cat stoppages or slowdowns and at the same time hold out for

¹⁶⁷ Al Campbell, Interview, March 25, 1991. Padgett had been a member of the USWA staff in the Toronto area but was replaced by Millard because he was critical of Millard's secretive approach to negotiations with the government and companies and his retreat from the union demands for a 40-hour week and increased wage rates. See Homer McMullen to Mitchell, May 29, 1946, MG 28 I 268, NAC; H.A. Hatfield to John Mitchell, May 28, 1946, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹⁶⁸ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, December 11, 1946. In Ontario one of the supporters of Padgett complained to Millard that he was "threatened and personally abused by members of the staff" who claimed to be acting on Millard's behalf. See Millard to Frank Quaife, November 9, 1946, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹⁶⁹ Steel Labour, Vol. XI, No.11, 1946, p.5.

ineffective penalties."¹⁷⁰

F) Conclusion

The national and international union leadership were committed to a legalistic and bureaucratic approach to conflict with the employer even before "industrial democracy" was won in the 1946 strike. The leadership had continued to utilize this approach long after it had lost its credibility with much of the rank and file. This offers only qualified support for Offe's view that the reliance on an external force, namely the state, occurs only after the union is securely established. Instead, at Sydney we saw that much of the national and international leadership was seeking such reliance before the union had fought its first major battles with the employer.

When strike action was taken, the national leadership attempted to manage the strike in a way which contained the militancy of the workers and yet still achieved a contract that would be acceptable to the majority of workers. In this regard, the national union leaders were what Mills termed "managers of discontent". The objective of the leadership was also to win the right to negotiate on behalf of the workers for the long-term and thereby securely establish the union. The leadership had neither the intention of challenging management rights in the work place, nor of mobilizing and educating the membership beyond what was minimally required to win an acceptable compromise.

¹⁷⁰ Waye to Millard, December 29, 1946, MG 28 I 268, NAC; Millard to Waye, December 31, 1946, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

Heron and Storey's contention that the strike of 1946 "brought a significant shift in the administration of the steel-making labour process - from autocracy to bureaucracy" is accurate.¹⁷¹ The establishment of work relations governed by "a negotiated rule of law" was a significant change. However, the agreement resulting from the strike represented a restricted form of "industrial democracy". In return for union recognition and material gains, the workers were required to limit their demands to those which would not essentially challenge the employer's right to make decisions about production and investment. They were also expected to accept measures designed to allow the employer to maintain a competitive position even if it meant a loss of jobs by some workers. This was something which union officials, especially those at the national and international level, were more willing to accept than were many rank-and-file workers. The former showed themselves willing to undermine and contain militancy as a necessary condition for obtaining the full recognition and acceptance of the union by employers and the state.

Canadian steel workers had more wages and benefits after the 1946 strike than they did prior to it, but according to many within the union, much less than what was within their grasp. The original wage demand, the unconditional granting of the five-cent differential for Sydney workers and the forty-hour week were not won in the 1946 strike. The gains in a sense reflected the steel workers' limited ability to challenge and pressure their own union leaders. The oppositional forces in this case were led principally by non-communist militants who were willing to stop production

¹⁷¹ Craig Heron and Robert Storey, 1986, *op. cit.* pp. 235-36.

despite the pressure to continue wartime production levels and maintain a close working relationship with company officials. This pressure was contained, however, due to the bureaucratic structures and centralized bargaining and decision making processes within the union. The development of these structures and processes seems to support Michels' view of the inevitability of increased bureaucratization; a sort of semi-professionalization of union positions and officials and finally the emergence of an oligarchical organization. However, the evidence presented in the chapter shows that these structures can also be understood as the result of ongoing conflict and human agency which becomes embedded in bureaucratic structures and a larger socio-economic context.

The events of the period under discussion demonstrate that the developing bureaucratic relations between the employer and the union were premised on the development of bureaucratic relations within the union itself. The latter was as much a point of contention for union members as the former, since they clearly influenced the choice of strategy and tactics to be adopted by the union in response to the challenges from the steel companies and the state. This issue was to continue to be a point of contention during the remainder of the decade.

An important outcome of the struggles in the early and mid-1940's was a further empowering of the more conservative and moderate forces within the union at the expense of the more radical elements within it. This was especially true at STELCO, according to Freeman, where the strike had been a more fiercely fought battle and where there was less disappointment over the 1946 settlement. The "CCF

faction" clearly led the strike, took credit for the victory and came to dominate the union local's political life.¹⁷² In contrast to this situation, according to Yates, the Canadian section of the UAW continued to be strongly influenced by the "Communist-dominated left".¹⁷³ Furthermore, this left faction, especially the non-communist militants, had played a key role in the 1945 Windsor Ford strike and the Rand formula which resulted from it.¹⁷⁴

The steady if unsatisfactory gains made through contract negotiations as well as the anti-communist, cold-war climate of the late 1940's were to make the ascendancy and consolidation of a moderate CCF faction possible. The rise of the anti-communist leadership and the marginalization of the more radical opposition within the steel union were key to consolidating "industrial democracy". The stabilization of the relationship between union and employers was also promoted by an expanding industry that was able to provide concessions. Maintaining the relationship required cooperation and accommodation. The union leadership's respect for management's rights, moderation in its demands for wages and benefits, and its commitment to upholding the contract to the point of disciplining "irresponsible" or oppositional elements within the membership were the bedrock upon which "industrial democracy" was built. They were also the hallmarks of "responsible unionism" which was to become entrenched within the USWA by the end of the 1940's.

¹⁷² Bill Freeman, 1982, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

¹⁷³ Charlotte Yates, 1993, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.* p.54.

Chapter VI

THE DEFEAT OF THE OPPOSITION AND THE ENTRENCHMENT OF "RESPONSIBLE UNIONISM", 1947-1949

A) Introduction

The 1946 strike and its settlement exposed certain tensions within the union. The pragmatic and cautious approach of the national and international leadership came into conflict with those who advocated more ambitious bargaining goals and a more aggressive and militant approach to winning them. This difference related to the question of the role of the general membership and the importance of its education and mobilization in confronting the employer. The national and international leadership adopted a bureaucratic and legalistic approach which relied on state intervention and minimal rank-and-file mobilization. Another important but related issue was control of the workplace and the legitimacy of job action during the term of the contract. The union leadership, especially at the national and international levels, was quite willing to surrender on this issue in return for union recognition and concessions on wages and benefits.

The winning of "industrial democracy" was viewed by the high level USWA leadership as not being only or mainly the product of militant struggles by steel workers and other workers. It was also viewed as the result of the practice of "responsible" unionism. Once "industrial democracy" was won the leadership tended to see militancy as playing a diminishing role. Instead, more trust was placed in negotiations with employers and consultations with government and state officials.

Opposition leaders and their supporters criticized union officials who uncritically embraced "responsible" unionism and they attempted to mobilize support for a more militant type of unionism. They also attempted to lead the rank and file in challenging the limits imposed by industrial democracy and the union leaders who tolerated and supported those limits.

This chapter describes how "responsible" unionism became entrenched within the local. While the opposition to it was quite strong prior to the 1946 strike, the opposition suffered a major defeat as the local executive became committed to the same vision and goals as those of the national leadership. The defeat occurred in the context of an increasingly anti-communist, cold-war atmosphere where red-baiting became one of the principal means of discouraging dissent within unions. The defeat of the opposition and the entrenchment of "responsible" unionism was accomplished in Sydney through concrete actions by union leaders and their supporters. The "responsible" approach to union activity by the local and national leadership was exemplified in the limited USWA support provided to the 1947 Cape Breton coal miners' strike, the failure to maintain contract uniformity in the basic steel industry, the increased role of the CCF in the union, and the withdrawal of support for the 1949 strike by the Canadian Seamen's Union. Before analyzing these events it is useful to outline the contours of "responsible" unionism as it had developed within the USWA by the late 1940's.

B) The Contours of Responsible Unionism

Although the national leadership was well versed in and totally committed to the tenets of "responsible" unionism, militants and radicals in the locals were antagonistic to the new brand of unionism. As part of their ongoing efforts to have the membership accept a responsible approach to union activity, the national and international leadership continually impressed upon them the appropriate limits of "responsible" unionism. A key element of such unionism was to not leave the decision to strike in the hands of the local members. Local leaders were constantly reminded by the national leadership of the limited control the local possessed in such areas as the right to strike, control over union dues, and the handling of grievances. The USWA's constitution declared that, "[n]o strike shall be called without the approval of the international president," and that the international union, rather than the local, was a party to all contracts. Furthermore, no member was allowed "to counsel, cause, initiate, participate in or ratify any action which constitutes a breach of any collective bargaining contract duly entered into."¹ The grievance procedure was also quite bureaucratic in that it consisted of four steps whereby, if necessary, grievances were taken by union representatives to the next higher step concluding finally with a meeting between an international union representative, a representative of the local, and high level management officials.² Therefore, an unresolved grievance was further and further removed from the workers who initiated it.

¹ Steel Labour, Vol. XIII, No. 7, 1948, p. 11.

² Steel Labour, Vol. XIII, No. 7, 1948, p. 6.

Despite the opposition at the local level, the national and international union leadership was quite successful at promoting a dominant union ideology which emphasized that the union was an organization that was not responsible only to the membership, but also to the "public", and in a sense to the employer, since it was viewed as a potential "partner" with the union. The national and international leadership did not see the union's interests as essentially opposed to those of the employers. According to the Canadian Director, "Labour must assert itself as a partner in industry and must be regarded on equal terms with the investors of money."³ This meant moving away from ideologically tainted terminology such as "capital and labour" and replacing it with "management and labour".⁴

The union leadership's approach included public relations techniques of which it was quite proud. For example, the union's publicity director, Murray Cotterill, pointed out the need for the use and repetition of phrases and catch-words with popular appeal when appealing for public support. He suggested that the union use the terms "levelling up" and "adjustments" rather than wage increases, and that it sponsor a campaign against higher steel prices rather than emphasize wage increases.⁵ Another important facet of the union's public relations approach was to improve the

³ Steel Labour, Vol. XII, No. 6, June, 1947. p.1.

⁴ "Kentucky Colonel" in his regular Steelworker column pointed out to steel workers that the new terms were imprecise since management did not necessarily include the owners of the means of production who were the real basis of capitalist power. See Steelworker, January 11, 1947.

⁵ USWA National Wage and Policy Conference, Toronto, February 14-5, 1947, MG 28 I 268. NAC.

profile of the union by cooperating with organized religion in the promotion of credit unions and cooperatives.⁶ A concrete link between the union, the church, and the co-op movement in Nova Scotia was the "study clubs" organized by the St. Francis Xavier University Extension Department, which, according to the Steelworker, insisted on the futility of strikes and high wages as a solution to workers' problems.⁷

The union's membership was kept informed of union activities through the pages of Steel Labour, but this included principally the numerous civic endeavours in which their local leaders were involved. For example, the appointment of Local 1064 President Ed Corbett as a citizens' representative on the local hospital commission was proudly reported, as was his appointment to the committee for a permanent causeway linking Cape Breton with mainland Nova Scotia. Even news of USWA members taking "co-op training" or participating in boxing tournaments was considered newsworthy enough to be included in the nationally distributed journal.⁸ However, there were limits as to how far the more militant among the rank and file would support such activity. When Local 1064 was offered two seats on the conservative Board of Trade, it was voted down by union members although, according to the Steelworker, it was supported by some "study club thinking"

⁶ USWA National Wage and Policy Conference, Toronto, February 14-5, 1947, MG 28 I 268, NAC. Millard was an executive member of the "Religion-Labour Foundation" and used his influence to get an annual donation for it from the international union. See Millard to MacDonald, December 8, 1949, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁷ Steelworker, February 14, 1948. International Secretary-Treasurer MacDonald even argued that cooperation between organized religion and labour was important for insuring democracy. See Steel Labour, Vol. XIII, No. 2, 1948, p. 10.

⁸ Steel Labour, Vol. XIII, No. 2, 1948, p. 2, 4.

individuals in the local.⁹ The purpose of Steel Labour was clearly one of boosterism rather than the education and mobilization of the membership or critical reflection on problems facing the union.

The public relations gloss was even put on relations between the union and the employer, relations which were characterized as based on a growing cooperation and respect. One issue of Steel Labour showed a picture of DOSCO General Manager C.M. Anson and a Local 1064 executive member enjoying themselves together at a DOSCO-sponsored bowling tournament, while another showed a picture of superintendents, foremen and workers at Sydney steel's open hearth expressing their determination to cooperate in increasing production.¹⁰ This "responsible", civic-minded approach by the union leadership certainly impressed DOSCO officials who praised the new developing relationship, although they often seemed more subdued about it than was the union leadership. However, DOSCO's Teamwork was published to promote "a broader understanding of Industrial Relations to assist joint Labour Management committees." It regularly used analogies of the corporation as a team or an army, although it was also attuned to the new "human relations" school of industrial management¹¹

Political action was channelled in the direction of lobbying government and

⁹ Steelworker, April 3, 1948.

¹⁰ Steel Labour, Vol. XII, No. 12, December, 1947, p.7; Vol. XIII, No. 2, February, 1948, p.4

¹¹ Teamwork, Vol. 3, No. 34, January, 1948; Vol. 9, No. 94, February, 1953, Beaton Institute.

electoral support of the CCF. The Canadian Director and most other leaders within the Canadian section of the USWA were active members of the CCF. They pushed the union towards electoral and financial support of the party rather than towards independent political action. They were not committed to building a larger social movement based on the solidarity of steel workers with other workers. The bland and business-like reports of Millard on the activities and policies of the CCL, and the USWA's support of same, was as close as the leadership came to recognizing the need for cooperation and solidarity among workers.¹²

The education of the membership was restricted to training of local executive officers and committee members who interacted with employer and state representatives through negotiations, arbitration, etc. The "summer camps," workshops, and seminars for existing and potential officers of the union offered such courses as "Social and Economic Problems," "Labour History and Legislation," "Industrial Relations and Collective Bargaining" and "Union Administration". Controversial political, ideological or historical issues were ignored or down-played in favour of the "down-to-earth problems of steel union members and local union leaders." Such problems included, "How to handle a grievance" and "job evaluation and time study."¹³

¹ See for example, Steel Labour, Vol. XII, No. 1, January, 1947, p.2.

¹³ Steel Labour, Vol. XII, No.6, 1947, p.4; Vol. XII, No. 7, 1947, p. 3. The biases to which the participants of such educationals were exposed can be appreciated by the fact that David Lewis, a leading figure in the CCF, was the "authority on Labour History" at one such summer camp.

Given the leadership's complete embrace of "responsible unionism" it is not surprising that the USWA leaders joined wholeheartedly in the anti-communist, cold-war movement at the end of World War II. In 1946, the union's international convention banned communists from holding union office, even at the local level.¹⁴ So effective was the silencing and purging of union radicals and dissenters at the convention that one newspaper report of it stated: "In those four days there was nothing faintly resembling a debate on the floor over anything at all."¹⁵ The Canadian section of the union had its own indigenous anti-communist leadership in Millard and other national officials, but this phenomenon was undoubtedly encouraged by the attacks on communists in the United States that were regularly reported in the pages of the Canadian edition of Steel Labour. Communism was portrayed as an outside influence and communists as people who were using the trade unions for political purposes.¹⁶ Of course, no such argument was ever used by the leadership against the CCF even though the social democratic party had a much stronger presence in the Canadian USWA than did the Labour Progressive (Communist) Party.¹⁷

¹⁴ Steel Labour, Vol. XI, No. 11, 1946, p.9.

¹⁵ Post-Record (Sydney), November 23, 1946.

¹⁶ Steel Labour, Vol. XII, No. 11, November, 1947, p.4.

¹⁷ The Canadian Congress of Labour to which CIO unions like the USWA were affiliated decided in 1943 to endorse the CCF as the "political arm of labour" much to the displeasure of communists and other non-CCF unionists. (See Norman Penner, The Canadian Left: A Critical Analysis, Scarborough: Prentice-Hall, 1977, p. 158.

C) The 1947 Coal Miners' Strike

The Cape Breton coal miners' strike of 1947 presented an opportunity for Sydney steel workers to repay the strong support which miners had provided to them. The UMWA had led the CIO movement and had been the principal financial backer of SWOC.¹⁸ The UMWA in Canada had also contributed \$30,000 to the USWA in the 1946 strike.¹⁹ Therefore, when the coal strike began, the Canadian head office of the USWA in Toronto made financial contributions to the UMWA strike fund, and the national leadership also appealed to all steel locals in Canada to provide financial assistance to the miners' union in Cape Breton. Also, the Sydney steel local organized weekly collections for the miners which totalled over \$5600 two months into the strike.²⁰

As for non-financial support, the Canadian Director wrote to Prime Minister King of his concern about the effects of the strike on coal supplies to steel producers. He appealed to King to help obtain a fair contract for the coal miners, arguing that it would ultimately result in a more content and efficient work-force, as he claimed now existed in the basic steel industry:

I am pleased to report to you that since the settlement of the steel strike last October, a new and very satisfactory program of efficient production has been developed....A more co-operative relationship exists between management and steelworkers; our members and their

¹⁸ Lloyd Ulman, 1962, op. cit., p. 15.

¹⁹ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, February 26, 1947.

²⁰ Steel Labour, Vol. XII, No. 4, April, 1947, p.4; USWA Local 1064 Minutes, April 23, 1947.

families are more content, and a long-standing sense of grievance is being removed.²¹

Millard also suggested that this new state of affairs had formed the basis for a new "type of co-operative employer-employee effort which we are testing in steel."²²

A major concern of USWA officials was DOSCO's plan to import American coal during the strike for use at the Sydney plant. Such imports would keep the plant operational, but would undermine the coal miners' strike. The question of whether the USWA should cooperate in unloading the coal or refuse to do so and in effect break their contract with DOSCO, was a pressing one for the union's local and national leadership. As the USWA staff representative at local 1064 stated to the union's National Director, "If they try to use American coal, I think we will have a delicate situation in Sydney as the company may insist on fulfilment of contract."²³

The problem for the USWA leadership was complicated by the fact that some steel workers were already calling for militant action in solidarity with the miners. An editorial in the Steelworker reflected this view when it stated that coal boats should not be unloaded at the steel company pier and that the local union executive should have "the courage to take a stand and telegraph Charlie Millard and ask him to order the membership not to unload the ship." Alternatively, the editorial argued that if the union contract did not allow them to refuse the unloading, then the miners themselves

²¹ Millard to King, March 16, 1947, MG 19, 7, Beaton Institute.

²² Ibid.

²³ Way to Millard, April 9, 1947, MG 28 I 268, NAC..

should picket the steel plant.²⁴ This latter view was supported by a letter from "Coke Ovens Displacee" who stated that it was time for "a showdown":

The hell with trying to conceal the hypocrisy any longer. Show up in force, you miners....don't let 1064 or its executive make decisions about 'crossing bridges'....The problem of billeting pickets is easily solved. Every company house on Victoria Road and Richmond St. will shelter a miner's wife and kids....Let Nicholson and the rest stand on the burning bridge. You miners stand in your striker[s]' rights and keep us out of the plant.²⁵

Local ex-president George MacNeil who was one of the leaders of this movement acknowledged that the union was "over a barrel", but insisted that it "must break the contract with the company and we must inform the company that we are not going to unload coal contract or no contract."²⁶

The appeals for solidarity with the miners were not successful in preventing the unloading of the coal. The pier workers at the plant did initially refuse to unload the boats, according to the Steelworker, but only until they got pressure from the steel union executive to do so.²⁷ However, any criticism of steel union officials was deflected because, according to them, the UMWA President indicated that the coal miners union considered the cargo "maintenance coal" and of no threat to the

²⁴ Steelworker, April 19, 26, 1947.

²⁵ Steelworker, May 3, 1947.

²⁶ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, April 2, 1947. Many steel workers were also concerned about the miners' reported intention to not let coal into Sydney to heat homes and run industry. See USWA Local 1064 Minutes, April 23, 1947.

²⁷ Steelworker, May 10, 1947.

strike.²⁸ The local 1064 leadership therefore was not put in the difficult position of being asked by a close fraternal union to violate their contract.

Nonetheless, the miners' strike exposed the restrictions which were placed on the steel workers by the newly achieved "industrial democracy". Expressions of solidarity with other unions were forbidden if they required that steel workers and their leaders violate provisions in their contract. These restrictions were something which the USWA leadership was reluctant to challenge even where their closest ally in the union movement was concerned. Nonetheless, opposition leaders and many other rank-and-file steel workers saw such restrictions as antithetical to a strong labour movement and effective trade unions.

D) Contract Negotiations and the Struggle for Unified Bargaining

The USWA had won recognition and some material benefits as a result of the 1946 strike, but there were still many important unresolved issues which left DOSCO workers dissatisfied and calling for change. One of the major disappointments of the strike was its failure to achieve the forty-hour week. A letter from "Ironyard" complained that steel workers who worked only five days a week were considered absentees by the employer, and a letter from a "steelworker" asked in frustration whether it would "be necessary to further resort to strike action" in order to secure the 40-hour week.²⁹ The local union executive as well as the national leadership

²⁸ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, May 7, 14, 1947.

²⁹ Steelworker, March 22, April 5, 1947.

were criticized for their lack of determination in dealing with the problem. Another letter to the Steelworker criticized Local 1064 President Corbett for deferring to the Canadian Director, who "is the boss."³⁰ A letter from "Open Hearth" criticized the union executive for putting up only "passive resistance" to DOSCO's program of "estimated efficiency forces", a euphemism for reductions in the workforce.³¹

The discontent was widespread enough that a rival organization was reportedly being set up in opposition to the USWA. This threat was apparently presented by Harold Padgett, who went to work for the American Federation of Labour (AFL). However, this approach was not widely supported and probably was not seen as a serious threat by the executive.³²

The frustration on the part of many workers was demonstrated during the first set of negotiations after the 1946 strike, which produced a tentative one-year contract offering a six-percent wage increase.³³ More than 600 workers voted against the contract, according to the Steelworker, despite "shameful gerrymandering of the executive."³⁴ A letter from "Scratcher" claimed that it represented "a new low in collective bargaining" and "a wholly one-sided swindle dictated by and for the

³⁰ Steelworker, May 10, 1947.

³¹ Steelworker, May 24, 1947.

³² Steelworker, March 29, April 5, 1947; USWA Local 1064 Minutes, February 19, 1947.

³³ "Supplemental agreement to February 6, 1947 agreement" (Signed on September 25, 1947), MG 28 I 268, NAC.

³⁴ Steelworker, May 3, 1947.

company."³⁵ Apparently, the Sydney and Algoma workers were pressured into accepting it because the "badly split" workers at STELCO had accepted the "take it or leave it" offer from the company.³⁶ Membership participation in the wake of the settlement was very low, according to the Steelworker, due to union leadership's collaboration with management.³⁷

The anger and frustration felt by many rank-and-file union members was related to the bargaining strategies and contract goals being pursued by the union leadership. Attempts by militants to strengthen the cooperation among the basic steel locals were successfully resisted by the national officials and their supporters in the locals. For instance, a resolution placed before the 1947 National Wage and Policy Conference, which called for all steel contracts to end on the same date, was defeated. Also, on the advice of the national leadership, it was decided not to specify the 1947 wage demands for upcoming contract negotiations, even though a motion for a 15-cent increase was advocated by many workers within the Sydney local.³⁸ The demand for a specific wage increase was, according to the Steelworker, a protest against the "Millard-dominated local executive."³⁹ A letter to the Steelworker protested that President Corbett "has too slavishly followed the policies of C.H.

³⁵ Steelworker, April 26, 1947.

³⁶ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, September 24, 1947.

³⁷ Steelworker, April 19, 26, 1947.

³⁸ USWA National Wage and Policy Conference, Toronto, February 14-5, 1947, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

³⁹ Steelworker, September 13, 1947.

Millard... which have done the union no good and which if continued will do it great harm."⁴⁰

The restrictions on job action during the life of the contract were also of great concern to many workers. The absence of what the editor of the Steelworker called "open end" contracts, "the last vestige of freedom of action," was harshly criticized as a "sell out" on the part of the executive. The editor of the Steelworker assessed the overall situation within the union as horrible:

Well, it's a horrible situation. The once militant steelworkers union in Sydney, born in struggle, led in its formative years by people who believed that an injury to one is an injury to all, established by the demonstrated solidarity of the workers in every department of the plant, [is] now scarcely better than the plant council that it threw in the ash can ten years ago.⁴¹

The Steelworker perspective undoubtedly reflected the views of some of the more militant members of the union, but it failed to account for the continued support of the executive by many workers. Also, it did not explain why the relationship between the local executive and the national leadership was not completely conflict-free. The national leadership's preferred negotiation strategy within basic steel, whereby one local was to establish a pattern contract which other locals would then follow, was criticized by many within the local who were in favour of having the "big three" locals bargain simultaneously. Other union members, including the President of Local 1064, thought that the Sydney or Algoma locals should establish the pattern

⁴⁰ Steelworker, October 4, 1947.

⁴¹ Steelworker, August 9, 1947.

rather than STELCO as was recommended by the national leadership. A STELCO-led pattern made sense from an economic perspective since STELCO was the biggest and most viable of the companies, but many workers in Sydney thought that criteria such as union militancy should be a factor in determining which plant was to be targeted. Local 1064 President Corbett pointed out to Millard that everyone acknowledged that STELCO was the strongest corporation in the steel industry:

However they also know that the weakest organization of the United Steelworkers in the big three plants is at Stelco.

Our people do not accept the proposition that the wages or terms of contract worked out between what is reputed to be the strongest corporation and the weakest union is of necessity going to be what is acceptable to the United Steelworkers as a whole....

It puts not only 1064, but the United Steelworkers as a whole, in a ridiculous weak-kneed position with the members themselves, the companies, the government and the public.

...Local 1064 realize what the boys in Hamilton are up against, and are trying to cooperate, but we don't intend to be considered the poor relatives of any outfit in this country....

It is pretty near time that somebody put things right. It is not my understanding that [local] 1005 has to carry the load for the United Steelworkers. There are two big locals on either side of them, namely 1064 and Algoma that, as long as 1005 is with them, can get what we want.

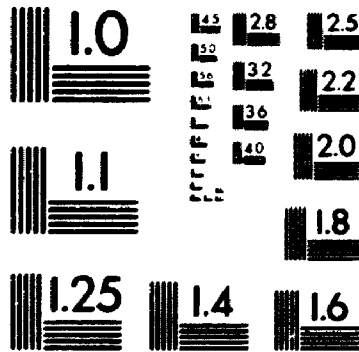
If on the other hand we lay back and let 1005 deal alone with Stelco for the three of us and then on top of that inform the world that such is the case, we might as well affiliate with the Canadian Manufacturers Association.⁴²

The criticism seemed to have had little impact on the national leadership. In

⁴² Corbett to Millard, February 5, 1948, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

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anticipation of the 1948 negotiations in the basic steel industry, the Canadian Director recommended to the National Policy Committee that the contract goals of the next round of negotiations be set by the directors and the local union committees since a strike in the basic steel industry would throw many fabricating workers out of work.⁴³ When this was adopted without prior discussion at the National Wage and Policy Conference, it brought charges of manipulation and undemocratic practices from the editor of the Steelworker. He claimed that the predominance of staff representatives and passive worker delegates produced such policies. He asked rhetorically:

Is this [National Wage and Policy Committee] conference to be another of those affairs where the rank and file delegates are outnumbered by staff men? Will the delegations from the locals consist of the usual one or two vocal fighters (who will be immediately branded as red) with the rest just going along for the ride and acting as spectators?⁴⁴

The Canadian Director again recommended that no specific wage demand be set by the conference, with the understanding that a \$45 weekly minimum be the "approximate" goal and that there be flexibility on the demand for a 40-hour week. These demands, in so far as they were specified, were considered modest by many workers in the Sydney local who thought the union should be demanding \$55 to \$60

⁴³ The only dissent recorded at the National Wage and Policy Conference came from "Brother Cook" who "registered his protest against giving the National Director a 'blank cheque' to do anything." USWA National Wage and Policy Conference, Toronto, October 4, 5, 1947, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁴⁴ Steelworker, August 30, 1947.

for a 40-hour week according to the Steelworker.⁴⁵ The leadership's timid negotiation strategy was adopted by the conference despite the fact that the union's Research Director had reported on the substantial profits and health of the industry, including the Nova Scotia steel industry.⁴⁶ Millard's success at overcoming opposition to such bargaining strategies, according to the editor of the Steelworker, was due to the support of "a machine of forty or so healers ready to do his bidding in exchange for a staff job."⁴⁷

In the 1948 negotiations, the STELCO local again led the pattern bargaining, and after several months, the central negotiating committee recommended that STELCO's workers accept an offer of a ten-cent wage increase with no reduction in the hours of work. This offer was considerably less than the union's goal of \$45 for 40 hours, and the STELCO workers rejected it to the delight of many Sydney steel workers.⁴⁸ A letter to the Steelworker from "SOS" charged that STELCO "wouldn't have had the gall to make such an insulting offer if the way hadn't been paved for it by Millard and other misleaders."⁴⁹ The District Director had reported that the workers at Sydney were ready to strike and he urged Millard to call a meeting of the

⁴⁵ Steelworker, March 20, 1948; Also see letter from "IronYard", Steelworker, December 27, 1947.

⁴⁶ USWA National Wage and Policy Committee, Toronto, January 16, 1948, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁴⁷ Steelworker, February 14, 1948.

⁴⁸ Steelworker, March 20, 1948.

⁴⁹ Steelworker, March 20, 1948.

national negotiating committee immediately, presumably as a way of fending off spontaneous strike action.⁵⁰

When STELCO and union negotiators reached a tentative agreement after a quick resumption of negotiations, the District Director and two members of the 1064 executive met with DOSCO officials in Montreal to discuss the STELCO negotiations. At that meeting they were assured by DOSCO officials that they would go along with the tentative STELCO settlement which provided a wage increase of 11.5 cents plus additional statutory holidays. When this was reported to the National Wage and Policy Committee, it was decided that the offer would be kept confidential as far as the local 1064 membership was concerned, at least until after it was voted on by the STELCO workers.⁵¹ The offer was subsequently recommended to the STELCO workers and accepted by them.⁵²

The Canadian Director confided to president Philip Murray that he was not particularly proud of the contract, but he justified it on the grounds that "our people did not feel they could secure sufficient additional income and at the same time reduce the work week to 40 hours." The "our people" to whom he referred clearly did not include many workers at Sydney. Millard further rationalized the contract by arguing that the USWA in Canada was making "a considerable contribution to sound industrial relations and uninterrupted production" and that he intended to write the Prime

⁵⁰ Nicholson to Millard, February 22, 1948, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁵¹ USWA National Wage and Policy Committee, Hamilton, March 27, 1948, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁵² Steelworker, April 17, 1948.

Minister to that effect. Millard also felt some pressure to defend the contract, because in addition to criticism from some USWA members, Millard also received criticisms from representatives of the Mine-Mill Union and the United Electrical Union who both reportedly called the contract "a sell-out".⁵³

The 1948 round of negotiations suggests that while a more cooperative relationship was developing between DOSCO and the union leadership, the relations between the latter and many Sydney steel workers was not based on mutual confidence. There was apprehension on the part of both the local and national leadership about the reaction of the Local 1064 rank and file to the proposed contract and the negotiation process. It also suggests that acceptance of the contract at Sydney would have been especially problematic if opposition leaders in the local had been given time to organize resistance to the recommended offer.

Once STELCO workers accepted the offer, great pressure was placed on Sydney and Algoma workers to accept it. This they did to the relief of the Canadian Director.⁵⁴ However, in the ratification vote at Sydney, over 700 rejected the settlement offer even though all executive members except one had strongly recommended its acceptance.⁵⁵ One of major objections to it was the "penalty clauses" which provided management with virtual control of the workplace and forbade strikes during the term of the contract. One of the strongest critics of the

⁵³ Millard to Philip Murray, March 29, 1948, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁵⁴ Millard to Nicholson, May 3, 1948, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁵⁵ Steelworker, May 1, 1948.

agreement was local 1064 ex-president George MacNeil, who stated that the numerous penalties "nullified" it as a collective bargaining agreement.⁵⁶ It is revealing that one 1064 executive member insisted that the union negotiators "made every effort to have [the penalty clauses] removed but once a thing like this is written into a contract, we find it hard to remove."⁵⁷ Clearly, the executive was under pressure to have the provision removed because many workers saw that it restricted the potential for action on the job.

Many workers were unhappy with Millard's leadership, which the editor of the Steelworker described as:

Bold militant statements to the press at the beginning of a wage 'drive'. Then when direct negotiations come close, fear-mongering.... Once the workers are tied down to contracts the big talk starts all over again.⁵⁸

Nonetheless, the union leadership continued to point out that it was maintaining uniformity within the basic steel industry with regard to base wages, hours, vacations and holidays. However, the uniformity was at a lower level than many workers desired or thought necessary. The Trenton plant was no longer part of the basic steel group and its wage rates, which once equalled those in Sydney, were now similar to the lower wage rates paid by other car foundries in Canada. Also, regional inequalities within the industry were very evident. The average hourly wage of Iron and Steel operations in the Maritimes was 70.4 cents, with an average of 48 hours per

⁵⁶ Steelworker, May 1, 1948.

⁵⁷ C.W. MacInnis to Millard, April 22, 1948, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁵⁸ Steelworker, April 17, 1948.

week, while the average wage among operations in Hamilton was 84.6 cents, with an average of 45.8 hours worked.⁵⁹

The next round of negotiations was to produce further tension between the local and national leadership. The Canadian Director announced that the union's contract demand for 1949 would be a base wage of \$48.50 for a 40-hour week. In light of the past record of the national leadership and continuing pressure from the rank and file, the President of the Sydney local asked for assurances from the national policy committee that the 40-hour week would be aggressively pursued. He made it very clear that the membership of his local wanted the 40-hour week to result from this round of negotiations and that conditions "were ripe" for winning it since there were high employment levels at the Sydney plant and a high demand for steel.⁶⁰ Indeed, DOSCO president C.B.Lang was later to confirm that steel demand was exceeding supply.⁶¹

Under pressure from oppositionists, the union leadership made a request for joint negotiations among the big three steel producers, but this was rejected by the companies. The STELCO local was therefore once again chosen to lead negotiations

⁵⁹ USWA National and Policy Committee, Hamilton, March 27, 1948, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁶⁰ Steelworker, January 29, 1949.

⁶¹ Teamwork, Vol. 5, No. 52, July, 1949, Beaton Institute.

and establish a pattern agreement.⁶² The DOSCO and Algoma locals, meanwhile, attempted to negotiate with their own employers on local issues while awaiting the outcome of the STELCO negotiations.⁶³ As for the STELCO bargaining, although an elected representative and a paid staff worker from each of the other basic steel locals were to take part in the negotiations, the local 1064 president soon complained that the demands set by the National Wage and Policy Committee had been put aside by a meeting in which there were no representatives from the Maritimes, except for the District Director. The apparent decision to lower the union's demands without consulting even the local executives prompted Corbett to ask: "Is an honest effort to be made to obtain the 40 hour week?"⁶⁴ Responding to rank-and-file pressure, he told DOSCO officials that the workers would strike for the 40-hour week if necessary and also conveyed this to the Sydney representative on the national negotiating committee.⁶⁵ Despite this pressure, the national negotiating committee soon reached a tentative settlement with STELCO based on a 44-hour week and a 10-cent increase. But communication between the Sydney local and the head office regarding the exact outcome of negotiations was so poor that President Corbett stated that the local

⁶² Primary Steel 1949 Negotiations - Correspondence, and Briefs, USWA National Wage and Policy Committee, Toronto, January 28, 1949, MG 28 I 268, NAC. As in 1948, the USWA Negotiation Committee consisted of the 3 National Directors and 1 Local union representative as well as one staff person from each of the three basic steel locals.

⁶³ Primary Steel 1949 Negotiations, Correspondence and Briefs, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, April 6, 1949.

"cannot get a definite statement from yourself, Sefton or anyone connected with STELCO negotiations.... Right now we are sitting here looking very stupid to everybody including ourselves."⁶⁶

Despite the tentative agreement at STELCO the local 1064 executive, led by the local President, persisted with the demand that DOSCO concede the 40-hour week.⁶⁷ However, after several unsuccessful attempts to negotiate further concessions from DOSCO, the local 1064 executive recommended the STELCO agreement to the membership. Local opposition leaders demanded a mass meeting to discuss the penalty clauses, among other things, but this was rejected by the executive, according to the Steelworker.⁶⁸ The contract was then ratified by an overwhelming majority of Sydney steel workers, according to an opposition leader, because it offered a reduced work week and back-time. The latter, he stated, was "a bribe" to get the workers to accept the penalty clauses.⁶⁹ While the inability to win the 40-hour week was perhaps the most important issue for most workers, some workers were clearly angered at the leadership's failure to eliminate the penalty clauses. Apparently, the issue of the penalty clauses was not pursued by the national leadership but was instead left to the locals to negotiate with their individual employer. This prompted one "steelworker" to state, "The rank and file membership

⁶⁶ Sefton to Nicholson, April 21, 1949; Corbett to Millard, May 6, 1949, Primary Steel 1949 Negotiations -Correspondence and Briefs, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁶⁷ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, May 4, 1949; June 1, 8, 1949.

⁶⁸ Steelworker, June 25, 1949; July 9, 1949.

⁶⁹ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, July 13, 1949; Steelworker, September 24, 1949.

of 1064 will be loaded down with the infamies of its present executive for the next 50 years."⁷⁰ Indeed, the effects of penalty clauses were felt several months later when a strike by workers in the Rod and Bar-Mill Department occurred over the issue of the displacement of workers. When the workers complained that the contract allowed such arbitrary action on the part of the company, the local's Vice-President reportedly defended the contract by stating that the membership had voted for it.⁷¹

E) Anti-Communism and the Limits of USWA Democracy

The unsatisfactory bargaining strategy was seen by at least some of the opposition as very closely related to the political orientation of the leadership and particularly its affiliation to the CCF. The editor of the Steelworker stated that the Canadian Director's strategy was part of a "Campaign of defeatism which is obviously calculated to discourage action by the unions and to leave them the alternative of voting CCF as their salvation."⁷² The incessant pressure from the national and local union officials for local 1064 to affiliate with the CCF was vigorously resisted by a large segment of the workers. Many of them resisted because they had allegiances to other parties, including the Labour Progressive Party (LPP), but many others saw union affiliation to any party as a potentially divisive issue which could split the membership. Some union activists believed that affiliation to the CCF

⁷⁰ Steelworker, July 16, 1949.

⁷¹ Steelworker, September 24, 1949.

⁷² Steelworker, December 6, 13, 1947.

would restrict the union's potential for independent political action. A letter from "General Yard", for instance, attacked the "CCF charlatans who think that political action begins and ends at the polling booth" and declared that steel workers would not "stand idly by and see reactionary spokesmen of a lone political group bull in and wreck it for their own selfish ends."⁷³

Clearly the antagonism between Communists and CCF members in the union was sharpening in the context of the developing cold war. The "united front", which had built the local and won "industrial democracy", was in danger of collapsing entirely. CCF members completely dominated leadership positions at all levels of the union by 1946, but Communists and independent oppositionists still maintained considerable influence within local 1064. There was some red-baiting in the local by 1947, but it was not commonplace.⁷⁴ And when the LPP was banned from using the local radio station, the leadership of the Cape Breton Labour Council and the Local 1064 executive were pressured to voice opposition to such measures.⁷⁵

"Red-baiting" in the Canadian section of the union was to some extent conditioned by developments within the American section of the union where there were more frequent and virulent pronouncements about the evils of communism and attacks on the rights of communists and their sympathizers. For instance, the

⁷³ Steelworker, December 27, 1947.

⁷⁴ Steelworker, November 1, 1947; January 31, 1948. Communists such as Annie Buller addressed miners and steel workers in the steel workers' union hall. See Steelworker, November 15, 1947.

⁷⁵ Steelworker, April 10, 17, May 1, 1948.

Canadian edition of Steel Labour contained Philip Murray's condemnation of the "commies" at the 1948 international convention and followed this with a reprint of one of President Truman's anti-communist speeches.⁷⁶ At the USWA convention in 1948, resolutions were passed which made Communists and "fellow-travellers" ineligible for any union position, including that of delegate to the international convention.⁷⁷ Apparently without any consideration of the Canadian membership, the convention also resolved that, "Our organization is an American organization... devoted to our democracy, to our constitution, to our country and its institutions."⁷⁸

The anti-communist campaign in the union's Canadian section involved less rhetoric and flag waving than in the United States, but it existed nevertheless. For instance, two members of a Windsor local were questioned as to their right to stand as delegates to the union's convention because, according to the Canadian Director, it "appears that these members of our union are either members, consistent supporters or active participants in the activities of the Communist Party [LPP]." He reminded the local executive in Windsor that according to Article III, Section 4 of the international constitution, such affiliations were illegitimate.⁷⁹ While there appears to have been little opposition to the anti-communist measures at the international convention, some Canadian steel workers opposed their implementation in Canada.

⁷⁶ Steel Labour, Vol XIII, No. 6, June 1948, p. 1; Vol. XIV, No. 2, February, 1949, p.2.

⁷⁷ Steel Labour, Vol. XIII, No. 6, p. 1.

⁷⁸ Steel Labour, Vol. XIII, No. 6, p. 10.

⁷⁹ Millard to James Forsyth & Wm Kelly, Sept 15, 1949, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

The Director of the Ontario district promised the locals that the anti-communist provisions would not be exercised, according to the Steelworker, but in fact, they had already been used at Algoma, while some other locals in Ontario were refusing to implement the restrictions.⁸⁰

By late 1948, the Canadian Director began openly to attack "communist infiltration" of the union in Canada, with appeals to the membership to be on guard against the menace.⁸¹ The Steelworker responded to these charges of infiltration by pointing out that it was Communists who built the union and that Millard and his ilk were the real infiltrators.⁸² Communists and other radicals in the Sydney local were influential enough that when Millard visited Sydney he refrained from red-baiting, although he was apparently quite critical of Communists when visiting the Trenton local. The editor of the Steelworker ridiculed what he saw as Millard's cowardly and two-faced approach:

How like Millard! Meek as a lamb in Sydney even when bolstered by Clarie Gillis, MP, who 'accidentally' dropped into the meeting. Apologetic and humble before the Sydney steelworkers, where any challenge may have been eagerly accepted. But what a lion in Trenton where there is not one communist in the union and where the members pay for the lack by lower wages than those in Sydney.⁸³

A letter of protest from local 1064 about the restrictions on political affiliation

⁸⁰ Steelworker. July 24, 1948.

⁸¹ Steelworker. September 4, 1948.

⁸² Steelworker. October 2, 1948.

⁸³ Steelworker. October 2, 1948.

was reportedly sent to the Pittsburgh office, but strong opposition was not voiced by the CCF-dominated executive.⁸⁴ That the executive agreed even to send a letter of protest was probably due to the fact that local union elections were about to be held. But the increasing use of anti-communist tactics was probably a factor in explaining why the opposition was unable to prevent incumbent executive members from obtaining a "sweeping vote of confidence" in the election.⁸⁵ One incident of red-baiting occurred when a supporter of the incumbent executive, a grievance committee representative, reportedly urged fellow steel workers: "For heaven's sake don't vote for the reds. What will the government think?"⁸⁶

The Canadian Director agreed wholeheartedly with the anti-communist restrictions of the international convention. He was congratulated by the international executive for his "splendid spirit of cooperation" in support of the constitutional changes which, it was claimed, "will greatly enhance the prestige and influence of the United Steelworkers of America."⁸⁷ Although communists and other oppositionists at Sydney were still influential in the union, they were undoubtedly concerned about the

⁸⁴ Steelworker, June 26, 1948. No such letter or any other reference to it was found by the author in the course of doing this research.

⁸⁵ Post-Record (Sydney), July 2, 1948.

⁸⁶ Steelworker, July 3, 1948.

⁸⁷ J.G. Thimmes to Millard, May 24, 1948, MG 28 I 268, NAC. Millard was, however, open to those members who saw the errors of their ways and were willing to break completely with their past radical policies. For instance, Millard intervened through the general counsel of the USWA in the U.S. to pressure the U.S. authorities to allow a former communist supporter access to the U.S. convention. See Millard to Arthur J. Goldberg, October 21, 1948, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

await the outcome at STELCO. The Coordinated Wage Study (CWS) was reported to be a major stumbling block as was the reappearance of a wage differential between the Ontario basic steel sector and the Sydney industry. STELCO finally settled for a base hourly rate of \$1.43 1/2 and union negotiators indicated to the Conciliation Board that local 1064 was quite willing to accept the STELCO settlement. DOSCO refused to agree to the settlement, claiming that it could not afford it since the implementation of the CWS was expected to cost as much as \$13 million.³⁹ The Canadian Director was "shocked and disappointed" with DOSCO's response and he insisted that "there must be wage parity" and that the union would not settle for "anything less". He argued that DOSCO was discriminating "against its employees, the community and province."⁴⁰ However, in his correspondence with the USWA president, Millard's position was quite different. Indeed, he expressed sympathy for DOSCO since it was "the poorest, most inefficient of the three producers and would have to pay out more money to follow the pattern."⁴¹

As a means of applying pressure to the company, the membership at Sydney adopted the slogan "No Contract by Labour Day, No Work."⁴² The Post-Record reported that a "Showdown looms in Sydney Steel Wage Talks," and Millard informed government officials that a strike for parity at Sydney "will have the united

³⁹ Post-Record (Sydney), August 8, 18, 1952; USWA Local 1064 Minutes, August 27, 1952.

⁴⁰ Post-Record (Sydney), August 19, 1952.

⁴¹ Millard to MacDonald, July 31, 1952, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁴² USWA Local 1064 Minutes, August 13, 20, 1952.

Conference because of the time lag between the conferences and negotiations.⁸⁹ The fact that the obvious alternative of rescheduling the national conference closer to the expiration of the contract was ignored suggests that an important reason for such a practice was to further limit the participation of oppositionists in the bargaining process. This meant that the concerns of the opposition were never seriously considered at the national level unless the union leadership approved of them.

Even if oppositionists from individual locals were strong enough to have resolutions sent to the National Conference and to have their delegates attend the Conference, other procedures could limit their effectiveness. One such practice was the establishment of a Resolutions Committee at the National Conferences which vetted all resolutions and recommended their acceptance or rejection.⁹⁰ In keeping with the practice at the USWA International Convention, these Committee members would have been selected by the Canadian Director and resolutions would have been reviewed and perhaps revised by the staff representatives before the Conference was held.⁹¹

The Committee could recommend non-concurrence on opposition resolutions and thereby influence the conference participants' decision on them. At the 1948 National Conference, the Resolutions Committee recommended a motion of non-concurrence on a number of opposition resolutions which resulted in their defeat.

⁸⁹ USWA National Wage and Policy Conference, Toronto, October 8-9, 1948, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Lloyd Ulman, 1962, op. cit., pp. 101-03.

These included: two resolutions condemning the leadership for not following through on the 1948 contract demands, a resolution asking for the establishment of district councils to facilitate the discussion of common problems among locals, another calling for larger and more representative national conferences, still another opposing "all forms of red-baiting" and one which advocated more communication between locals. The last one defiantly demanded: "Whereas the need for secrecy about our membership and executives is long since past...Be it resolved that the national office facilitate communication between the locals by making the list of local secretaries available to all steel local secretaries in Canada."⁹² The resistance by the leadership to greater coordination and communication among the locals appears to have been motivated by a desire to isolate and marginalize oppositionists and thereby prevent a challenge from them at the regional or national level.

The national leadership also used the constitution as an instrument to limit opposition by declaring "out of order" resolutions that opposed established union policy. The implicit rationale for such action was that the Canadian section of the union could not overturn or rightfully challenge the established policies of the international union. On these grounds, motions calling for the reopening of contracts and the setting of a definite wage demand for the basic steel locals were called out of order. Resolutions calling for a membership referendum on future dues increases were also ruled out of order, as was a resolution calling for the rejection of the

⁹² USWA National Wage and Policy Conference, Toronto, October 8-9, 1948, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

constitutional amendment which prevented communists or communist supporters from participating in union affairs. A resolution calling for the Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers Union (MMSWU) to be reinstated in the CCL, and for the USWA to stop raiding that union, was also ruled out of order, although Millard tried to justify the raiding on the grounds that: "The laws of the province provide a democratic procedure for ascertaining the wishes of workers in a plant as to their union affiliation."⁹³ In reporting to the Sydney local on the 1946 conference, the local president announced that most of the local's resolutions were accepted or modified, suggesting that none of the oppositional resolutions came from Local 1064.⁹⁴ This was quite a change from previous conferences when local 1064 activists regularly challenged the national and international leadership.

The defeated resolutions from locals were of three basic types. First, were those that called for more militancy and determination in pursuing contract demands. While the union was making progress on its wage and other demands, changes were occurring much too slowly for many workers given the high demand for steel. Some of these contract demands, such as the 40-hour week, had been declared union policy at its inception more than a decade ago. Secondly, the national leadership opposed resolutions which would strengthen direct links and solidarity between the membership of the USWA and other unions, especially communist-led ones. Thus, the defeat of anti-raiding and anti-red-baiting resolutions was crucial to the established

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, October 20, 1946.

leadership.

Finally, there were those resolutions which called for more openness and democracy within the union. In particular, many activists wanted area councils that would provide them with greater links to members in other locals. The national leadership discouraged area and regional councils of unions and other forms of direct inter-local communication since it feared such activities would promote united action among oppositional forces within the union. These restrictions limited the potential of the opposition to contest the national leadership through elections since the constitution required that candidates obtain nominations from at least five locals. Although in 1948 George MacNeil won the Sydney nomination for Canadian Director against Millard by a 2 to 1 margin, he was not able to obtain the nominations from four other locals and Millard was therefore considered officially unopposed for the position.⁹⁵ Union structures and processes within the union were designed to minimize the opportunity for debate and direct contact among the local memberships since greater horizontal links between locals could potentially weaken the monopoly of control exercised by the head office. Instead, the leadership actively promoted structures and policies that would build vertical links between the national office and the locals. Therefore, nine of thirteen resolutions on internal affairs which were

⁹⁵ Steel Labour, Vol. XIV, No.1, January 1949, pp. 1, 12. However, the Steelworker claimed that MacNeil did get five nominations but that the one from Wabana was received too late and that therefore Millard's victory by acclamation happened on a technicality. See Steelworker, January 15, 1949.

submitted to the 1948 conference were rejected or called out of order.*

F) 1949: The Defeat of the Opposition

The rightward shift in the union's politics was consolidated in 1949. That year witnessed heightened attacks by the union leadership on the radically led Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers Union (MMSWU), the further encroachment of the CCF into union affairs, and the withdrawal of support by the union leadership for the militant Canadian Seamen's Union (CSU), which was locked in a life and death conflict with the employers, the Canadian state and the American-based Seamen's International Union (SIU). All of these developments produced conflict within the Sydney local between oppositional forces and the CCF-dominated executive and their supporters. In each of these intra-union conflicts, the spectre of communist influence and the use of red-baiting tactics as a means of discrediting the opposition became an issue within the union. The outcome of these struggles was the marginalization of oppositional leaders and the causes for which they stood.

The attack on MMSWU by conservative union leaders came to the attention of most Sydney steel workers when C.S. Jackson of the United Electrical Workers union informed them in an open letter of the raiding activity of the USWA. After an address from one of MMSWU's representatives, a local 1064 membership meeting passed a resolution against the raiding action. This resolution of support was undoubtedly made

* USWA National Policy Conference, Toronto, October 8-9, 1948, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

possible by the mobilizing efforts of leading local oppositionists who apparently took the local executive by surprise. The executive subsequently organized another meeting with their supporters in attendance and had the resolution in support of MMSWU struck down on the grounds that it was based on misinformation supplied by "a group" which refused "to f . . . out the other side of the story."⁹⁷ The Canadian Director defended the union's raiding actions by insisting that the MMSWU leadership was not doing a good job of representing their members and that the USWA was merely offering those workers a choice. The USWA, he claimed, was following "the democratic wishes of the majority of the metal workers."⁹⁸

In response to this argument, opposition activists continued to emphasize that union dues were being used to raid other unions rather than organize the unorganized. However, they were unable to change union policy on this issue.⁹⁹ Undoubtedly, oppositionists had the USWA's failure to organize Dofasco's Hamilton plant in mind. Dofasco had implemented some innovative corporate welfare policies that undercut the desire for a union.¹⁰⁰ However, oppositionists believed that Dofasco was never really tested by the union because its resources were being channelled into raiding other unions.

⁹⁷ Corbett to Millard, February 17, 1949, MG 28 I 268, NAC; Steelworker, February 26, 1949; USWA Local 1064 Minutes, February 2, 9, 16, 1949.

⁹⁸ Millard to Nicholson, February 8, 1949, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁹⁹ Steelworker, May 14, 1949.

¹⁰⁰ Robert Storey, "Unionization Versus Corporate Welfare: The Dofasco Way", Labour/Le Travail, No. 12 (Fall) 1983, pp. 7-42.

Another indication of the declining influence of the opposition was the CCF's increasing influence within the Canadian section of the USWA. Millard boasted that the union's contributions to the 1949 Election Fund constituted almost half of the total contributions of all unions in Canada".¹⁰¹ The Sydney local was not affiliated to the CCF, but it had established a practice of sending delegates to CCF conventions. These delegates were not always CCF members, but the union executive attempted to remedy this in 1948 by nominating a slate of delegates to the convention. There was considerable opposition to this and it appears that it was successfully resisted by the opposition and their supporters in this instance.¹⁰² The local executive promoted the CCF by pointing out that it was already endorsed by the USWA's National Wage and Policy Conference and the Canadian Congress of Labour (CCL). In its enthusiasm for the CCF, the local 1064 executive even pushed for union donations for CCF electoral candidates in mainland Nova Scotia. This bid for financial support was unsuccessfully resisted by the opposition.¹⁰³

The pro-CCF forces in the local did suffer one major set-back, however. The resistance to CCF affiliation was widespread enough that the executive was forced to hold a plant-wide referendum on the question.¹⁰⁴ The result was the defeat of the motion for affiliation with over nine hundred voting against it while several thousand

¹⁰¹ Steel Labour, Vol. XIV, November, 1949, p. 5.

¹⁰² USWA Local 1064 Minutes, November 10, 17, 1948.

¹⁰³ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, November 24, 1948.

¹⁰⁴ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, February 9, 1949.

abstained from voting.¹⁰⁵ Clearly, only the executive and a small minority of workers wanted to affiliate with the CCF. The majority wanted a union that pursued independent political action, a goal that had been long sought by Cape Breton unionists.¹⁰⁶ Nonetheless, the Canadian Director was so displeased with the rejection of the affiliation motion, according to the Steelworker, that the Sydney local was put on "Millard's 'red' list."¹⁰⁷

If the CCF issue temporarily galvanized broad based opposition to the established leadership, the question of support for the Canadian Seamen's Union (CSU), which was under attack because of the union's left-wing leadership, was one which polarized the membership in favour of USWA officials. Despite red-baiting by some members of the Sydney local, the executive and many rank-and-file members initially supported the CSU by giving donations, organizing collections at the plant and declaring that no "hot cargo" from non-unionized boats would be handled by steel workers.¹⁰⁸ The last of the support activities led to debates as to whether the steel workers could strike in support of the CSU given the contract and its "penalty clause". Opposition leader George MacNeil, who had been in support of breaking the contract during the coal miners' strike, declared this time that the contract would have

¹⁰⁵ Steelworker, February 26, May 21, 1949.

¹⁰⁶ See M. Earle and H. Gamberg, "The United Mine Workers and the Coming of the CCF to Cape Breton", Acadiensis, Vol. XIX, No. 1 (Autumn) 1989, pp. 3-26.

¹⁰⁷ Steelworker, April 2, 1949.

¹⁰⁸ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, March 2, April 27, 1949; Steelworker, April 2, 16, 23, 1949.

to be honoured. He stated that although he "did not see where any union man could have voted in favour of a contract with such a clause... a majority had voted that way and we were bound by it." This indicated a split within the opposition between some of the independent left and pro-communist workers.¹⁰⁹ Nonetheless, a resolution stating that steel workers would not be expected to pass through picket lines set up by the CSU was passed at a later meeting.¹¹⁰ Local President Corbett maintained that support of the CSU was a matter of "union principle" and that the question of the union leaders' politics was irrelevant.¹¹¹

Pressure mounted, however, as the CSU set up picket lines at various ports in Canada. At Sydney, steel workers were asked by CSU representatives to honour picket lines being set up at the plant in protest over the loading and unloading of ships which were operated by non-CSU crews at the DOSCO pier. Local president Ed Corbett had tried to intervene as a mediator between the CSU and DOSCO, which had signed a contract with the rival SIU.¹¹² The local executive suddenly withdrew the support it had promised earlier. The executive also denied CSU members and their supporters access to a local union meeting and the opportunity to present their case to the membership. Amidst warnings from DOSCO that the contract would have to be honoured and charges by steel union officials of interference in union affairs

¹⁰⁹ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, April 13, 1949.

¹¹⁰ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, April 20, 1949.

¹¹¹ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, April 27, 1949.

¹¹² USWA Local 1064 Minutes, May 25, 1949.

from outsiders, the same meeting decided not to honour the picket lines of the CSU.¹¹³

In response to this decision, Jeff Hurley, Executive Secretary of the National Seamen's Defence Committee, claimed that local 1064 members were being used as "scabs" and that the local 1064 executive members were acting as "scab-herders." He appealed again to steel workers not to cross CSU picket lines.¹¹⁴ The crisis intensified when striking seamen and their supporters, who included some miners, had assembled at the plant gate. The apparent attempt to stop the loading and unloading of ships, and perhaps the entire plant operation, precipitated a confrontation at the plant gate closest to the piers. As a way of intimidating the CSU strikers and their supporters, union executive member Dan MacInnis and the General Manager of the plant stood side by side urging the steel workers to cross the CSU picket lines.¹¹⁵ That they had the company's cooperation in this was clear from president Corbett's later announcement that the executive "had asked the company to have our members resume their normal work and not assemble at the gates any more."¹¹⁶ A letter from "Guess Who" claimed that the union executive had organized several hundred steel workers to go to the plant gates to intimidate the CSU pickets.¹¹⁷ The Steelworker

¹¹³ Steelworker, May 28, 1949.

¹¹⁴ Steelworker, May 28, 1949.

¹¹⁵ George MacEachern, Interview, June 4, 1992.

¹¹⁶ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, June 1, 1949.

¹¹⁷ Steelworker, June 11, 1949.

reported that some of these steel workers went to plant gate number six armed with clubs and that they even received wages from DOSCO for the time spent engaged in such actions.¹¹⁸ The situation became so intense that some oppositionists intervened to ask the seamen to withdraw their pickets in order to defuse the situation and avoid a violent confrontation.¹¹⁹

This episode further polarized the local. It widened the rift between oppositional forces and the executive and their supporters. Considerable criticism was directed at the executive of local 1064, in particular its president. While in the recent past Corbett was viewed as an honest if misguided militant by some oppositionists, an editorial in the Steelworker vilified him. It claimed that steel workers had to choose between "Corbettism or Communism" with the former standing for "penalty clauses in the contract, out-right collaboration with the boss, strike breaking and several other unpleasant things." A letter from "Open Hearth Dump" charged that Corbett "formed an unholy alliance with DOSCO."¹²⁰ This is somewhat ironic since Corbett appears to have been the only executive member who agonized over the decision to withdraw support from the CSU.

The opposition was supported by militants and radicals from other unions. A letter to the Steelworker from a CSU member in Montreal stated, "Most of the seamen here are dumbfounded that Cape Breton workers crossed our picket line...."

¹¹⁸ Steelworker, June 4, 1949.

¹¹⁹ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, June 1, 1949.

¹²⁰ Steelworker, June 4, 1949.

An old tradition has been broken."¹²¹ At a Cape Breton Labour Council meeting, militant unionists criticized the 1064 executive and called Corbett a "rat," "traitor," and "company stooge." When Corbett was summoned to a Cape Breton Labour Council meeting in order to defend the actions of the local executive, the executive and their supporters attempted to pressure all prospective local 1064 delegates by passing a resolution at a local union meeting which called on all local 1064 delegates to support the executive position at the Labour Council meeting. Rather than comply with the resolution three of the steel workers resigned as delegates to the Labour Council.¹²² When Corbett attended the labour council he argued that the CSU was not the legally certified bargaining agent aboard the DOSCO boats and that all USWA contracts must be honoured. The editor of the Steelworker reminded its readers that while he made much of "the sacred contract" in this instance, Corbett had led the wildcat strike of electricians in 1945.¹²³ This of course was before the union had won "industrial democracy".

The crisis around the CSU strike also set off a larger reaction by conservative and anti-communist forces. In industrial Cape Breton, this reaction included a boycott of the Steelworker. DOSCO put pressure on the paper's advertisers, and company police chased young boys selling the paper away from the plant gates.¹²⁴ The

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Steelworker, June 18, July 9, 1949; USWA Local 1064 Minutes, July 6, 1949.

¹²³ Steelworker, July 9, 16, 1949.

¹²⁴ Steelworker, June 4, 11, 1949.

national leadership of the USWA, supported by the leadership of the CCL, joined in undermining support for the paper by warning USWA staff members that the Steelworker was pursuing "a vindictive policy toward various responsible elected union officials."¹²⁵ At the 1949 annual National Wage and Policy Conference, a resolution was passed stating "that this conference condemn[s] in the strongest terms the untrue and communist-inspired attacks on our union and its leaders." The Steelworker was clearly viewed as part of the outside interference from communists.¹²⁶

By 1949 oppositional leaders were completely on the defensive. An indicator of this state of affairs appeared in the form of a letter from a member of the opposition who expressed alarm and frustration as he witnessed what he considered to be the sabotaging of the union:

Who is sabotaging our union? A union that was fought for and formed by our veteran steelworkers through "blood, sweat and tears". A union that has, since its laborious birth been a powerful weapon and the only voice our workers have had to penetrate the greedy bulwarks of capitalist boss management.... Why are negotiations put off until after the contract expires, spreading disunity among various locals.

The author's cry of frustration was accompanied by an urgent and perhaps desperate plea to the membership to become more involved in the union.

¹²⁵ Millard to all Staff representatives, September 14, 1949, MG 28 I 268, NAC; Steelworker, October 8, 1949.

¹²⁶ USWA National Wage and Policy Conference, Ottawa, October 1-2, 1949, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

Wake up steelworkers, you are in a dangerous state of lethargy. Come to your meetings, express yourselves and demand your rights. This is your fight, your future that hangs in the balance.... In closing I would add that never in the history of our union has there been so many men, with so much to do, doing so damn little.¹²⁷

The ineffectiveness of these appeals was acknowledged in a Steelworker editorial by "Kentucky Colonel" who stated that 90 per cent of the membership of the union "take no interest in its affairs, never attend its meetings, never read its literature, never do anything but pay their dues."¹²⁸ The desperate appeals by opposition leaders were based on their view that only greater participation by the rank and file could reverse the current trend within the union. The shift in the balance of power in favour of the established leaders was evident from their ability to win electoral contests, including the elections of delegates to various union conventions. For example, the local delegates to the 1949 CCL Convention and the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour Convention included not one opposition leader.¹²⁹

G) Conclusion

During the late 1940's the conservative and moderate forces within the Canadian section of the USWA consolidated their power at the expense of the more progressive elements within it. The gains made through contract negotiations combined with the developing anti-communist, cold-war climate made the rise of this

¹²⁷ Steelworker, April 16, 1949.

¹²⁸ Steelworker, August 6, 1949.

¹²⁹ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, August 17, 24, 1949.

leadership and the defeat of oppositional leaders possible. This occurred despite the dissatisfaction among significant sections of the membership about the slow pace of these gains and the limited degree of democracy within the union. However, the failure to channel membership dissatisfaction into an effective opposition was evident by 1949. By the end of that year oppositional leaders at Sydney were clearly in retreat, although they still had some influence in the local. Their base of support was reduced but not insignificant.

This paralleled the situation at STELCO where, according to Freeman, the left-wing group led by Tom McClure was losing influence to the right-wing faction led by USWA staff member Larry Sefton.¹³⁰ But the opposition at STELCO's Local 1005 "was clearly inspired by the Communist Party of Canada and had links to the CPC wing of the trade union movement."¹³¹ This differed somewhat with the situation at Sydney, where key opposition leaders were not clearly associated with the Communist Party of Canada. In fact, George MacNeil, the leading oppositionist in the local since 1942, was not a communist and distanced himself from the positions of communists within the union on several occasions. However, the fact that he would ally himself with communists on specific issues was probably enough to taint him as a "fellow traveller". It is also important to note, as does Michael Earle, that rank-and-file members of the CP and the CCF often failed or refused to strictly follow party

¹³⁰ Bill Freeman, 1982, op. cit., p. 74.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 75.

policy and allied readily with other union militants.¹³² Nonetheless, at particular moments the tensions between communist and non-communist oppositionists within the local undoubtedly weakened the ability of the opposition to resist the push towards what the established leadership called "responsible" unionism.

The opposition or "left caucus" within the Canadian section of the UAW, according to Yates, had greater success in resisting the advance of "responsible" unionism. This was despite tensions among the left caucus which consisted of communists, left-wing CCFers, nationalists and other militant trade unionists. They were a highly influential, and even sometimes dominant, force within the union in the late 1940's.¹³³ Due to their strong presence at all levels of the Canadian UAW, especially within the District Council, according to Yates, the opposition or left-wing forces maintained a secure, if somewhat defensive, position within the union even as the cold-war, anti-communist climate took hold at the end of the decade.¹³⁴ This contrasted with the somewhat marginalized and fractured opposition within the USWA. A key agent in undermining rank-and-file militancy and progressive leadership was the leadership of the CCF which did its utmost to undermine both the UAW left caucus and the opposition within the steel and coal unions of Cape

¹³² Michael Earle, "'Down with Hitler and Silby Barrett: The Cape Breton Miners' Slowdown Strike of 1941", Acadiensis, Vol. XVIII, No. 1 (Autumn) 1988, pp. 56-90. See pp. 58-59.

¹³³ Charlotte Yates, 1993, op. cit., pp. 66-68.

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 76.

Breton.¹³⁵ Unfortunately, unlike the UAW, the Canadian section of the USWA, with its lack of intermediate organizational forms between the national and the local level, offered no such forum for the opposition of various locals to strategize against the conservative policies and practices of the leadership.

With regard to Michels' argument about the tendency toward oligarchy within all large organizations, the divergent paths taken by the USWA and the UAW, despite their large size, suggests that the undermining of democracy is not always an inevitable consequence of increased bureaucracy and organizational growth. Certainly, it demonstrates that the precise nature and pace of the development of oligarchy can vary between large organizations. Such an argument is further supported when one considers that the District Councils of the UAW created another layer of bureaucracy and yet encourage rank-and-file participation rather than discourage it. The use of these intermediate structures by the opposition lends support to the Marxist view that while structures are important the utilization of such structures by militant and socialist-minded activists can make a difference.

The ascendancy and consolidation of moderate, "responsible" leadership and the marginalization of progressive elements within the USWA was a necessary element in the entrenching of a restrictive form of "industrial democracy" within the steel industry. It was made easier by expansion within the industry which allowed the employers to provide concessions. The deepening cold-war environment was also to

¹³⁵ Charlotte Yates, 1993, *op. cit.*, p. 73; M. Earle and H. Gamberg, 1989, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

assist the union leadership in further marginalizing opposition leaders. Within such a climate "responsible" union leaders could preach respect for management's rights, practice moderation in their demands for wages and benefits, and demonstrate a commitment to upholding the contract to the point of containing and disciplining "irresponsible" elements within the membership. Thus "responsible" unionism and "industrial democracy" developed together in a state of mutual dependency.

Chapter VII

INDUSTRIAL DECLINE AND THE RECONSTITUTION OF THE OPPOSITION, 1950-59

A) Introduction

As the decade of the 1950's began, local 1064 was firmly under the leadership of "responsible" unionists who were strongly opposed to communism or any other radical ideology. These leaders accepted management's right to maintain control over production and investment and were against any union violation of contractual agreements regardless of the circumstances. This included contract provisions which restricted job actions by workers during the life of the contract whether in defense of their own interests or in solidarity with other workers. These restrictions were accepted by the leadership as necessary to insure union recognition by the state and employers.

As the decade progressed, the oppositionists were placed increasingly in a defensive position, and their influence among the membership continued to decline. This occurred within the context of an increasingly anti-communist political environment. Militant unionism was also undermined by the continued expansion of the economy and the consumerism which accompanied it.

The continuing efforts by oppositionists within local 1064 to adapt to this hostile atmosphere and remain active in local union politics is the focus of this chapter. Oppositionists continued to object to provisions of the contract that limited

their opportunity to take job action. Unlike the established union leadership, they pressed for a strategy based on membership education and mobilization, with strike action as a key option to be used in forcing the employer to meet union demands. The opposition also criticized the use of red-baiting tactics as a means of discrediting the resistance to "responsible" unionism. However, these tactics proved very effective as the opposition was virtually silenced by the mid-1950's.

One of the most important struggles during the 1950's was the attempt by Sydney steel workers to maintain parity with workers at STELCO and Algoma. Despite efforts by oppositionists to push the established leadership to confront DOSCO on this issue, parity was lost. This failure arguably was not just a function of the relative decline of the Sydney plant, but was also a result of the union leadership's reliance on state mediation rather than the education and mobilization of the membership. While the cold-war climate hastened the decline of the opposition in the early 1950's, the growing crisis in the Sydney steel industry and the loss of wage parity with Ontario steel workers gave birth to a new generation of opposition leaders. The key members of the new reconstituted opposition were not publicly committed to any political party, but instead were independent militant unionists.

B) The Erosion of Pattern Bargaining

By the beginning of the 1950's, the union had won full recognition from the company as well as significant monetary concessions. But basic issues such as seniority rights and hours of work had by no means been settled to the satisfaction of

the membership. A letter from a "Disillusioned Victim" and unemployed steelworker protested the favouritism and lack of seniority at the plant as well as the weak response to these problems by the union leadership. The letter concluded that, "The union that our fathers fought for, and formed after a lengthy struggle, has lost its militancy and is now nothing but a hollow echo of its former self."¹ Another letter from a "Working Plug" stated that 500 steel workers had been laid off recently and that there was not even a protest from the executive or District Director Nicholson. DOSCO could get away with such actions, according to the letter, because of "clause 16" which prohibited job action during the life of the contract.²

As the 1950 round of negotiations began, demands for a 40-hour work week, an unspecified wage increase, and a pension and welfare plan were adopted by the National Wage and Policy Committee. The Canadian Director proudly admitted that the demands were "practical, realistic and, in fact, conservative under the circumstances.... There is no reason for any deviation from the policies we have set."³ As in previous negotiations, the STELCO local was chosen to establish a pattern contract and after several months, it had reached an agreement with STELCO which included the 40-hour week, an eight-cent wage increase, and "progress" in health and pensions. However, long after this agreement was reached, local 1064 was

¹ Steelworker, January 28, 1950.

² Steelworker, March 18, 1950.

³ Millard to Corbett, Cronk, and Dalrymple, April 12, 1950, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

still bargaining with DOSCO, which refused to follow the STELCO agreement.⁴ The company claimed that it was maintaining a profit only because of government subsidies and that it could not afford to adopt the STELCO deal.⁵

The Canadian Director insisted that the union would not back down from its demand for "uniformity for the Steel workers of this Dominion." Local 1064 president Corbett threatened strike action and announced to the membership that "if we call a strike vote we are not calling it to bluff the company, it is to call you out on the street in order to win our fight."⁶ When negotiations failed, the union leadership called for conciliation since the recently passed Industrial Relations and Disputes Investigation Act (IRDIA) obliged the union to pursue this route.⁷ But the request for conciliation was accompanied by a threat from the local leadership that "Either the board brings down a finding favourable to us and the co. accepts it or a strike vote will be called for."⁸ However, when the idea of a wildcat strike was raised by militants, it appears that it was not given serious consideration by the executive.⁹

The executive's militant words reflected the determination of the steel workers to win the 40-hour week and keep pace with other workers in the basic steel industry.

⁴ Millard to MacInnis, August 22, 1950, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁵ Nicholson to Millard, June 6, 1950, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁶ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, June 21, 1950.

⁷ Post-Record (Sydney), June 13, 20, 1950; Bob Russell, 1990, op. cit., pp. 226-28.

⁸ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, June 28, 1950.

⁹ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, July 5, 1950.

It also undermined opposition criticisms of the executive. A letter from "Coke Ovens" chided the "boys" who opposed the "penalty clause" and took the "anti-steel union stand in the C.S.U. dispute", reminding them of the militant stand being taken by the executive.¹⁰ Their militant stance also undoubtedly helped the incumbent local executive win reelection in the midst of the dispute.¹¹

After further negotiations and conciliation, a majority of the executive agreed on a settlement with DOSCO, but the proposed contract was different from the STELCO agreement. The DOSCO agreement, according to the Steelworker, was based on a freeze in weekly wages and a 40-hour week in the second year, whereas the STELCO contract provided for a reduction in wages for the first of the two years with a wage increase in the second year.¹² While a majority of the local 1064 executive including the president were for the proposed agreement, District Director Nicholson and other executive members tried to discredit the agreement by pointing out that it was not based on the findings of the conciliation board, but rather was the result of an agreement between a majority of the local executive and DOSCO management. The District Director urged the membership to reject the offer and "to

¹⁰ Steelworker, June 24, 1950.

¹¹ Oppositionist Jim Ryan and pro-establishment Ben O'Neil also sought Corbett's position. See USWA Local 1064 Minutes, June 21, 1950. O'Neil was considered to be more conservative than Corbett since he reportedly incited workers to attack CSU picketers at the plant gate during the 1949 strike. See Steelworker, June 24, 1950.

¹² Steelworker, July 22, September 16, 23, 1950; Teamwork, Vol. 7, No. 74, May, 1951, Beaton Institute.

authorize all steps necessary to secure satisfactory settlement."¹³ The differences among the leadership were reflected in the membership when over 1,400 members voted against the proposed agreement while more than 2,100 voted for its acceptance.¹⁴

This episode suggested a dramatic reversal in the roles historically played by the national and local leadership. Whereas in the past the local leadership had pressured the national leadership to take more militant positions, now it appeared that the national leadership was urging the local leadership to be more militant. However, the national officials were relying on the decision of the conciliation board to extend the pattern agreement to DOSCO. Most of the local leadership had little confidence that a better outcome would be produced by the conciliation process and probably saw a strike of only Sydney steel workers as placing the local in a precarious position. That a better agreement was possible was suggested later by DOSCO's General Manager, who declared that DOSCO was "operating at the highest rate of output it has ever achieved," and by DOSCO's President Forsyth, who stated that it was partly due to the outcome of negotiations that the company's prospects were better than "excellent".¹⁵ DOSCO later announced a \$16,000,000 expansion program for its Sydney plant.¹⁶

¹³ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, September 6, 1950.

¹⁴ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, September 20, 1950.

¹⁵ Teamwork, Vol 7, No. 70. and 74, January and May, 1951, Beaton Institute.

¹⁶ Teamwork, Vol. 7, No. 76, July, 1951, Beaton Institute.

The break in pattern bargaining became an issue again when the union used an optional re-opener clause to be implemented after the expiration of the first year of the contract. The lack of parity had created problems of "timing and pattern-making," according to the Canadian Director.¹⁷ This fear proved founded as the interim agreement left the wage rates at Sydney "completely out of line and inadequate" and comparing "unfavourably" with those of STELCO and Algoma.¹⁸ However, oppositionists did not blame this result completely on the local leadership. A letter from "United We Stand" charged that Millard and other leaders "haven't taken any practical, concrete steps to organize the fight."¹⁹ The national leadership was relying on negotiations and conciliation, but the Steelworker called for "an aroused, united membership, demonstrating their support on and off the job, mass meetings, leaflets, plant gate meetings during working hours and a general agitational and information campaign to keep the workers informed of all details of negotiations."²⁰

One of the principal points of dissatisfaction for some workers continued to be the local and national leadership's unwillingness to resist management's arbitrary rule in the workplace. The union leadership's inability to get the company to address the numerous outstanding grievances was a persistent point of contention. A specific problem not being addressed by the leadership, according to a letter from "Human

¹⁷ Millard to Nicholson, January 15, 1951, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹⁸ Millard to O'Neil, July 10, 1951, MG 28 I 268, NAC: Millard to Forsyth, December 19, 1951, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹⁹ Steelworker, June 30, 1951.

²⁰ Steelworker, July 14, 1951.

Equality", was that a proper seniority system was not yet in place and that "negroes" in particular were discriminated against at the plant.²¹ The Steelworker stated that "Steelworkers tell us that there was never a time even during plant council days, when the bosses in the general office were so obviously indifferent to the grievances of the workers."²² The Grievance Committee of the Mills Department even threatened to resign in a body unless something was done about unsettled grievances; furthermore, there was no grievance committee whatsoever at the Coke Ovens Department.²³ When workers took job action in order to pressure the company, union representatives did not support such action. Instead, according to a letter from "Ironyard", they urged a return to work.²⁴

The Steelworker also claimed that steel workers were coming to the realization that the contract was "a trap ... a trap they must smash out of if their union is to be anything more than a dues collecting agency and a barrier to united and effective action."²⁵ This assessment was undoubtedly based on members' criticisms of the union leadership as well as job actions taken by steel workers. When workers at the Dock Yard Department refused to go to other departments and Rod and Bar Mill workers struck as part of a protest against unsafe conditions, the editor of the

²¹ Steelworker. March 24, 1951.

²² Steelworker. February 10, 1951.

²³ Steelworker. January 26. June 14, 1952.

²⁴ Steelworker. January 19, 1952.

²⁵ Steelworker. March 31, 1951.

Steelworker called such action an example of "the spirit of '37'," which "did so much to make the steelworkers union what it was in the late thirties and early forties."²⁶ In the summer of 1951, there were sporadic and unauthorized work stoppage, at the open hearth and several other departments in opposition to stalled wage negotiations.²⁷ Later, Clause 16 of the contract, which forbade job action during the life of the contract, was reported to have been used against 500 mechanical and electrical workers and to have cost them an average of \$60 in fines deducted from their pay.²⁸

The Steelworker claimed that the union's "stocks are so low right now that most members sneer when you mention it."²⁹ However, there was apparently also a feeling of cynicism about the oppositional leaders and their ability to change things. This became evident when little more than half the local 1064 membership voted in local 1064 elections, resulting in the incumbent executive being reelected, except for Corbett who was replaced as president by the staunchly anti-communist Ben O'Neil.³⁰ However, the local union leadership appeared to have the sympathy of company officials such as DOSCO president Forsyth. He stated that while industrial relations at DOSCO were, "at time[s] unreasonable and hostile... in the main I

²⁶ Steelworker, December 2, 1950; April 7, 1951.

²⁷ Steelworker, July 28, 1951.

²⁸ Steelworker, September 22, 1951.

²⁹ Steelworker, May 26, 1951.

³⁰ Steelworker, June 28, 1952.

believe that officers of trade unions are competent, well intentioned men who are trying, sometimes under great handicaps, to carry on a tradition well-earned and well-deserved, of great service to their membership."³¹

When the newly elected union executive prepared to negotiate a new contract in 1952, opposition leaders suspected that the union leadership would again take a conservative approach to negotiations and put forward a motion that the unity of the "big three" steel locals be fought for by delegates to the upcoming policy conference. However, this resolution was defeated, as it promoted the view that the three basic steel union locals should negotiate simultaneously with the big three producers as was done during the 1946 strike.³² This "unified" approach was rejected in favour of the established strategy of pattern bargaining.³³

The union's "national" demands during the 1952 contract talks consisted of a base hourly wage rate of \$1.46 and other improvements related to shift premiums, severance pay, vacations, statutory holidays and protection against contracting out. Another objective of the union was the completion and acceptance by both sides of the Coordinated Wage Survey (CWS) which would provide a standardized job classification system with a rate of pay attached to each classification rather than the

³¹ Teamwork, Vol. 7, No. 80, November, 1951, Beaton Institute.

³² Steelworker, February 16, 1952.

³³ Steel Labour, Vol. XVII, April 1952, p .1.

individual occupying the position.³⁴ Yet another stated objective was to obtain basic wage parity between Sydney steel workers and those at Algoma and STELCO within the life of a two-year contract.³⁵ Due to the break in the pattern agreement during the previous set of negotiations, the base hourly rate in the Ontario sector was \$1.36 but only \$1.32 1/2 at DOSCO. Also the average hourly wage at DOSCO was \$1.52, but at Algoma it was \$1.68, and \$1.70 at STELCO.³⁶

During negotiations, the Canadian Director came to the realization that such an objective probably could not be achieved without a strike and wrote to President MacDonald in Pittsburgh that "prospects now point to trouble, especially at Sydney, N.S."³⁷ This prospect may have presented a problem for the international leadership since 650,000 steel workers in the United States had already struck and placed considerable demands on the union treasury.³⁸

As in previous negotiations, the union and the companies eventually went to conciliation. After a few hearings, the Conciliation Board at Sydney adjourned to

³⁴ Post-Record (Sydney), June 17, 1952. The CWS was first developed for American steel workers. The scheme involved the use of separate management and union committees which were to classify each job and assign a wage based on 12 "factor requirements". Each factor was assigned a range of "point values" that were to correspond to the level of responsibility, training, skills, effort and hazards involved. See Robert Storey, "The Struggle for Job Ownership in the Canadian Steel Industry: An Historical Analysis", Labour/Le Travail, No. 34 (Fall 1994), pp. 85-86.

³⁵ Millard to O'Neil, September 3, 1952, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

³⁶ Post Record (Sydney), June 14, 1952.

³⁷ Millard to MacDonald, June 16, 1952, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

³⁸ Steelworker, June 28, 1952.

await the outcome at STELCO. The Coordinated Wage Study (CWS) was reported to be a major stumbling block as was the reappearance of a wage differential between the Ontario basic steel sector and the Sydney industry. STELCO finally settled for a base hourly rate of \$1.43 1/2 and union negotiators indicated to the Conciliation Board that local 1064 was quite willing to accept the STELCO settlement. DOSCO refused to agree to the settlement, claiming that it could not afford it since the implementation of the CWS was expected to cost as much as \$13 million.³⁹ The Canadian Director was "shocked and disappointed" with DOSCO's response and he insisted that "there must be wage parity" and that the union would not settle for "anything less". He argued that DOSCO was discriminating "against its employees, the community and province."⁴⁰ However, in his correspondence with the USWA president, Millard's position was quite different. Indeed, he expressed sympathy for DOSCO since it was "the poorest, most inefficient of the three producers and would have to pay out more money to follow the pattern."⁴¹

As a means of applying pressure to the company, the membership at Sydney adopted the slogan "No Contract by Labour Day, No Work."⁴² The Post-Record reported that a "Showdown looms in Sydney Steel Wage Talks," and Millard informed government officials that a strike for parity at Sydney "will have the united

³⁹ Post-Record (Sydney), August 8, 18, 1952; USWA Local 1064 Minutes, August 27, 1952.

⁴⁰ Post-Record (Sydney), August 19, 1952.

⁴¹ Millard to MacDonald, July 31, 1952, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁴² USWA Local 1064 Minutes, August 13, 20, 1952.

support of the Steelworkers union."⁴³ However, Labour Day saw no contract and no strike. Direct negotiations as well as conciliation talks continued into October with the implementation of the CWS said to be the outstanding issue.⁴⁴

A mass meeting was finally called to explain the company's latest offer, but the leadership prohibited motions from the floor, a measure that was designed to prevent the possibility of a motion of support for immediate strike action. This was a real possibility since some members at previous local union meetings had argued that the workers would have to "hit the bricks" before the company would compromise on the CWS.⁴⁵

When a settlement was finally reached, the two-year contract provided Sydney steel workers with a \$1.43 base wage rate at the end of the contract in 1954, a rate which STELCO and Algoma would achieve earlier in the contract. It also left Sydney steel workers with a smaller increment between job classifications than their counterparts in Ontario.⁴⁶ The lack of parity with Ontario prompted the local executive to insist that they were not "trying to sell the contract" although they

⁴³ Post-Record (Sydney), August 22, 23, 1952.

⁴⁴ Post-Record (Sydney), September 16, 18, October 1, 3, 5, 1952. The resistance to the implementation of the CWS by Dosco is understandable since, according to Robert Storey, such classification schemes were designed to reduce wage disparities and "provide mutually understood lines of advancement and promotion" which undermined some of the arbitrary use of power by the employer. Furthermore, Storey argues that over time such a system led to internal labour markets which were utilized by workers "to lay ownership claims to their jobs." See Robert Storey, op. cit. 1994, pp. 77-78.

⁴⁵ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, October 5, 8, 1952.

⁴⁶ Steel Labour, Vol. XVII, September 1952 p.1; November, 1952, p. 1.

recommended acceptance of it.⁴⁷ However, the Post-Record pointed out that the average \$100 per worker in back-time "comes at a good time, just a few days from Christmas."⁴⁸ Undoubtedly this was an important feature in prompting acceptance of the contract by a large majority.⁴⁹ Clearly, the opposition was ineffective in its efforts to have the workers reject the contract.

C) Red-Baiting and the Containment of Militancy

Oppositional forces were restricted in expressing and promoting alternative strategies and policies partly because of the anti-communist political culture taking shape within the USWA. Union officials had shown themselves quite willing to compromise with the employers, but they were less willing to compromise with dissenters within their ranks. They remained resolute in their opposition to communists and others who might want to change the goals and strategy of the union. Philip Murray, in an anti-communist speech at the 1950 convention in Atlantic City, boasted that "...I think we are about the only organization in the United States that has taken practical steps to eradicate Communism from our movement."⁵⁰

The anti-communist zeal was also adopted by local USWA leaders in Canada. For instance, local 1064's President Ed Corbett had attacked the peace movement as

⁴⁷ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, November 26, 1952.

⁴⁸ Post-Record (Sydney), November 25, December 5, 12, 1952.

⁴⁹ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, December 3, 1952.

⁵⁰ Steel Labour, Vol. XV, June 1950, p. 12.

communist inspired.⁵¹ However, under Corbett's successor, Ben O'Neil, the leadership of the local showed itself to be in the vanguard of anti-communism within the labour movement. The most striking example of this was the union's raiding of the Maritime Marine Workers' Federation (MMWF) in Nova Scotia and the USWA leadership's use of red-baiting tactics against "commies" within the MMWF. In 1952, the "Marine Workers Union" was denied certification in several Nova Scotia port communities by the Nova Scotia Labour Relations Board on the grounds that some of the union's leaders were communists. The President of the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour, who was a member of the Board, supported the decision to withhold certification to the union. When the MMWF successfully challenged this ruling in the courts, local 1064⁴ oppositionists urged their local executive to pressure CCL and TLC representatives on the Labour Relations Board not to support an appeal of the court's decision. This the executive refused to do, arguing that they should not interfere with labour representatives on the Board.⁵²

The actions of the President of the Federation of Labour prompted the MMWF to submit a resolution to the Labour Federation's annual convention criticizing his refusal to support the union. Marine workers' representative J.K. Bell stated that this decision was "directed against the union movement by reactionaries aided by men supposed to be representatives of labour."⁵³ The anti-communist leadership within

⁵¹ Steelworker, July 7, 1951, p. 3.

⁵² USWA Local 1064 Minutes, May 28, 1952.

⁵³ Post-Record (Sydney), November 19, 1952.

the labour movement turned this "attack" on the Federation President into an opportunity for a general assault on all oppositional forces within the union movement that were thought to be associated with or sympathetic to communists. The Sydney Post-Record headlines, "Communism under Fire: Housecleaning of N.S. Trade Unions Likely," told of the coming confrontation between the supporters and opponents of the MMWF at the upcoming Nova Scotia Federation of Labour Convention.⁵⁴

One of the principal leaders of the anti-communist campaign at the Federation Convention was local 1064 president Ben O'Neil, who, in McCarthyite fashion, red-baited J.K. Bell on the convention floor by asking him, "Are you a communist?" When Bell answered no, that he was a member of the Labour Progressive Party (LPP), O'Neil asserted " I think Bell is a Communist." When several delegates interjected in support of Bell at this point, they were silenced by the chair.⁵⁵ O'Neil took the opportunity to boast to the convention that communists were not allowed in the USWA, but he noted that "disruptive influences" were still present in the union and would have to be dealt with. He was joined by Dan MacKay, 1064 Vice President, who attacked the "reds" as did USWA District Director Nicholson. John Lynk, representative of the Cape Breton Labour Council and future President of the Federation, accused Bell of getting instructions from Moscow.⁵⁶ The Marine

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Post-Record (Sydney), November 19, 1952.

Workers' resolution against the Federation President was thus easily defeated.⁵⁷

The USWA District Director defended the steel union against the raiding charges. He claimed that the decision by the Pictou workers to join the USWA was "voluntary" and even suggested that the USWA was promoting democracy within the union movement. The leadership's decision to raid the MMWF and attack its leadership while it was under siege from the state demonstrated its strong adherence to anti-communist ideology and its organizational ambitions rather than a concern for democracy. As early as 1944, the Canadian Director had declared to his staff that he considered shipyard workers in the Maritimes to be steel workers, "but any move to affiliate with us must come from them."⁵⁸ Clearly the USWA leadership was not waiting for the Marine Workers to ask for affiliation. Instead, they aggressively intervened once the anti-communist propaganda had weakened the MMWF

The USWA leadership was so determined to bring Marine Workers into the union they even defied the CCL's decision to have the Pictou local placed under CCL jurisdiction until the supreme court decided on the MMWF's appeal of the labour board's decision.⁵⁹ When the President of the CCL wrote to Millard criticizing the action by the USWA at Pictou, the Canadian Director was evasive and pleaded ignorance, claiming he had not received a report from his staff person in the area. Meanwhile, he had written to the USWA representative in charge at Pictou and

⁵⁷ Post-Record (Sydney), November 20, 1952.

⁵⁸ Millard to Hessian, November 18, 1944, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁵⁹ Post-Record (Sydney), November 19, 20, 1952.

indicated that the union should proceed since there was "no question [of] our jurisdictional right to accept their affiliation."⁶⁰ The CCL president later stated in a letter to Millard that he was disappointed that "your organization should be the first international affiliate to have the doubtful honour of raiding the jurisdiction of a national affiliate to the congress.... It is not my intention to be a party to making a farce out of Congress regulations, nor will I remain inactive while the foundation upon which the Congress was built is under attack."⁶¹ The attempt to make the Pictou shipyard workers a direct affiliate of the CCL was resisted by the USWA leadership to the point where Millard informed the USWA president that he would go along with it only if both the workers and the company agreed.⁶²

Indeed, the strongest allies of the USWA appeared to be the state and the company operating the Pictou shipyard.⁶³ This became clear after the labour relations board denied certification to the Marine Workers Union and the company "discharged eight leading members of the local union." According to a MMWF representative, the company and the liberal Member of the Legislative Assembly for the area had pressured the workers to affiliate with the USWA and were in fact acting as "organizers for the U.S.W.A.", thus "promoting a form of the worst sort of

⁶⁰ A.R. Mosher to Millard, January 31, 1952, MG 28 I 268, NAC; Millard to Alphonso Murray, January, N.D., 1952; MG 28 I 268, NAC; Millard to Mosher, February 13, 1952, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁶¹ Mosher to Millard, February 19, 1952, MG 28 I 268, NAC

⁶² Millard to MacDonald, April 4, 1952, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁶³ M. Hubley to Millard, February 19, 1952, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

company unionism."⁶⁴ Two years later, after both the Nova Scotia Court of Appeals and the Supreme Court of Canada had decided in favour of the MMWF, the Pictou shipyard workers were still represented by the USWA, which refused to relinquish its control. The correspondence strongly suggests that this was due to the CCL's reluctance to take action against their largest affiliate as well as the fact that anti-communist ideology and policies were becoming more acceptable within the movement.⁶⁵ As for the "communist" leaders of the Marine Workers, J.K. Bell subsequently lost the election for president of Local 1 of the MMWF, and Murray Lowe was removed as business agent of the union.⁶⁶

The raiding of the MMWF and the response by trade union oppositionists clearly demonstrate that oppositionists throughout the labour movement, including opposition strongholds like local 1064, were on the defensive. The USWA leadership was in the forefront of the attack on those who advocated alternatives to the established union leaders and their policies. Oppositional leaders, whether communists or independent radicals, were being silenced and marginalized.

Within the Canadian section of the union, the USWA leadership continued to

⁶⁴ Hubley to Mosher, March 13, 1952, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁶⁵ Millard to Mosher, June 17, 1952, MG 28 I 268, NAC; D. MacDonald to William Carey, June 28, 1954, MG 28 I 268, NAC. For example, Millard was congratulated by CCL representatives for USWA contributions to its organizational "campaign funds" which were used to raid unions such as Mine-Mill and UE. Millard took the opportunity to quietly criticize the UAW in Canada for its "refusal ... to cooperate" in the campaign. See J. MacKenzie to Millard, March 31, 1953, MG 28 I 268, NAC; Millard to MacDonald, April 2, 1953, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁶⁶ Post-Record (Sydney), December 13, 1952.

use constitutional procedures, among other means, to defeat opposition resolutions.⁶⁷ The often lopsided votes at the Canadian policy conferences in favour of positions advocated by the national officials ignored the views of many rank and file workers. With only a few representatives from each local allowed to attend these conferences, the opposition and their views were not even represented at them since the established leadership and its supporters ensured that their people were chosen as delegates. For example, at the 1950 Policy Conference, a standing vote showed two out of 128 delegates were opposed to a resolution defending the union's raid of Mine-Mill. But this issue was hotly debated by the membership in Sydney, who were quite divided on it.⁶⁸ Furthermore, resolutions endorsing the CCF were easily passed at these national meetings even though there was fierce resistance from the Sydney steel workers to having the "union used as a milk cow."⁶⁹ Oppositionists reminded the local membership that the workers had voted against affiliation, but representatives from Sydney apparently still voted for CCF affiliation at national conferences.⁷⁰ Oppositionists also failed to influence national votes on controversial questions about building closer relationships among the various locals or the amount of dues they

⁶⁷ See for example, Steel Labour, Vol. XVIII, April, 1953, p. 1. As this issue of Steel Labour indicates, the constitutional procedures were reinforced with an appeal to the loyalty of the membership, that is loyalty to the union and union leadership rather than loyalty to union principles.

⁶⁸ National Wage and Policy Conference, Winnipeg, September 22-3, 1950, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁶⁹ Steelworker, November 3, 1951, p .3.

⁷⁰ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, November 22, 1950.

paid.⁷¹

These results were repeated at subsequent conferences in the early 1950's. At the 1952 Policy Conference, four resolutions protesting against recent dues increases met with the non-concurrence of the Resolutions Committee since it was argued that the increases were authorized by the international convention in accordance with the constitution.⁷² When the report from local 1064 delegates to the convention agreed with dues increases, it was protested as unacceptable by the opposition, because the convention had proposed no plan for organizing the unorganized. However, the report was accepted when the majority of members at the meeting voted with the executive.⁷³ A resolution which protested the "underhanded" methods employed by the international executive board in increasing the salaries of paid officials met the same fate when the Canadian Director argued that "if our members stop to consider that they are the 'employer' in relation to our officers and staff, I doubt if they will want to deny the increases which they in convention authorize."⁷⁴ The 1953 conference saw the same treatment given a resolution proposing that membership in

⁷¹ National Wage and Policy Conference, Winnipeg, September 22-3, 1950, MG 28 I 268, NAC; USWA National Wage and Policy Conference, Vancouver, September 15-6, 1951, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁷² USWA National Wage and Policy Conference, Toronto, September 18-9, 1952, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁷³ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, May 21, 1952.

⁷⁴ USWA National Wage and Policy Conference, Toronto, September 18-9, 1952, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

the locals choose their own staff.⁷⁵

When opposition resolutions could not be ruled out of order, the resolutions committee often replaced the offending resolution with a much more acceptable version, as was done with a resolution which originally called for formal autonomy for the Canadian section of the USWA.⁷⁶ Most of the concerns of the opposition were thus strongly resisted by the union leadership to the point of not even receiving a mention in the Canadian Director's report on union progress. Instead the 1952 report made reference only to the "outstanding gains" in collective bargaining and the impressive growth of the union in Canada from 262 locals with 62,000 members in 1951 to 280 locals with 70,000 members in 1952. The Canadian Director even proudly reported that most of the expansion in Quebec had come in the mining sector, which was the jurisdiction of Mine-Mill.⁷⁷

D) Resistance Amidst Industrial Crisis

Although the USWA leadership was somewhat successful at using red-baiting tactics to stifle the opposition, it could not deny the membership's demand for more determined action to address problems within the industry. In 1953, when DOSCO

⁷⁵ USWA National Wage and Policy Conference, Montreal, September 10-12, 1953, MG 28 I 268, NAC. The Steelworker claimed that steel workers did not know neither how many staff were employed by the union nor what their salaries and expenses were, because union reports were so vague. See Steelworker, December 12, 1953, p. 1.

⁷⁶ USWA National Wage and Policy conference, Toronto, September 18-9, 1952, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁷⁷ Canadian Director's Report, "Canada - 1952", MG 28 I 268, NAC.

implemented an efficiency plan with the purpose of making the plant more cost-efficient and competitive. the loss of jobs was protested by the union executive after it was pressured to do so by rank-and-file workers. Local 1064 members also protested that the correspondence on the issue between the union and the company was kept secret.⁷⁸ When lay-offs were imposed without adherence to seniority guidelines. Open Hearth workers took job action.⁷⁹ Coke Ovens workers protested against the speed-ups and "a co-operative union executive running interference" for the company.⁸⁰ The leadership's strict adherence to the contract prevented some industrial action from occurring as noted by some workers who expressed the view that "if it wasn't for the penalty clauses in the contract we could defend our jobs."⁸¹

Some of the membership continued to criticize the executive's continued support of the CCF despite the rejection of local union affiliation to the party. When a union meeting voted \$2500 to the CCL's Political Action Committee (PAC), it was opposed by some local activists. Oppositional leaders called it "a CCF raid on the union treasury" since the PAC fund was a "slush" fund for the CCF.⁸² The ability of the union leadership to organize its supporters and counter the opposition was demonstrated when the resolution to contribute \$2500 was carried by a vote of 68 to

⁷⁸ Steelworker, April 11, 1953, p. 1.

⁷⁹ Steelworker, May 9, 1953, p. 1.

⁸⁰ Steelworker, September 3, 1953, p. 1.

⁸¹ Steelworker, August 22, 1953, p. 1.

⁸² Steelworker, April 18, 1953, p. 2.

9.⁸³ Nonetheless, despite their limited influence, oppositionists continued to pressure the executive. A union protest against the RCMP interrogation of some 1064 members because of their left-wing political involvement was forced on the executive by the opposition.⁸⁴ Local union president Ben O'Neil was said to be unsupportive of these harassed workers and was even accused of red-baiting one worker.⁸⁵ It was such resistance by the opposition that no doubt prompted him to state in a Labour Day address that labour was walking a tightrope between the employers and "sinister, unwholesome, interests quite apart from the general welfare of labour."⁸⁶ Such thinly veiled attacks on oppositionists brought charges of intimidation against the executive which was also criticized by some activists at the Cape Breton Labour Council.⁸⁷

The crisis at the Sydney plant continued into late 1953 with hundreds of workers laid off and scores more on "broken time." According to the Steelworker, there was neither a protest from the union leadership nor proposals from them to deal with the situation.⁸⁸ The protests against lay-offs were dismissed by local President O'Neil with the argument that the contract had always allowed for such lay-offs.⁸⁹

⁸³ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, April 8, 1953.

⁸⁴ Steelworker, May 30, 1953, pp. 1-2.

⁸⁵ Steelworker, June 6, 1953.

⁸⁶ Steelworker, September 19, 1953, p. 1.

⁸⁷ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, June 3, 1953.

⁸⁸ Steelworker, October 31, 1953.

⁸⁹ Steelworker, December 12, 1953.

By 1954 the total number of steel workers laid off at Sydney reached 1,200, reducing employment from 4,791 in August 1953 to 3,530 one year later.⁹⁰ A number of letters in the Steelworker protested the situation and the union leadership's inaction. A letter from "Fed-up" stated that 1,000 steel workers were laid off, but the local executive was wasting time on out-of-town union business.⁹¹ Another embittered worker who was laid off at the plant said that DOSCO's efficiency measures should be applied to "the huge staff of peanut politicians and hangers-on who draw down fat salaries from the United Steelworkers of America."⁹² A third letter suggested that "If Ben and the boys are helpless to cope with the situation, why not be honest enough to admit it and resign.... before the union is completely destroyed."⁹³ Still another letter from "Down and Out" accused the union executive of "not even raising a stink.... A bunch having a good time with trips and not working and getting paid for it."⁹⁴ "Open Hearth" wrote that the men are "savagely demanding thorough-going revision of those clauses that make a mockery of the principle of seniority."⁹⁵ Another "Union Member" also attacked the "shackling penalty clauses" in the contract. He also claimed that favouritism was being shown to some of the better paid

⁹⁰ USWA Submission to Atlantic Development Board, p. 12, USWA, 1938-1970, MG 19, 7, Beaton institute.

⁹¹ Steelworker, December 5, 1953, p. 4.

⁹² Steelworker, December 12, 1953, p. 1.

⁹³ Steelworker, January 2, 1954, p. 3.

⁹⁴ Steelworker, January 23, 1954, p. 3.

⁹⁵ Steelworker, February 20, 1954, pp. 3-4.

workers who supported the clauses. According to the same letter, "The ordinary joes around the plant have their own way of tagging these 95 cent moochers but the language is a bit too rugged to print."⁹⁶

In the midst of this conflict, the Steelworker took the opportunity to point out the contradictory results achieved by full union recognition and the limitations of USWA democracy. One editorial claimed that the union check-off was a right, "but there is a limit to how much the workers should pay for this convenience."⁹⁷ Another editorial criticized the way in which parliamentary procedure was used by some "as an instrument to bewilder and befog" and was taking the place of "union principle."⁹⁸ While the Steelworker intensified its criticism of the local leadership, the company complimented the executive and applauded what they saw as the "growth of mutual respect and understanding between representatives of management and labour."⁹⁹

The respect for the employer's rights and the unconditional adherence to the contract was evident at all levels of the union and union strategies were based on these principles. Less emphasis was placed on membership mobilization and job action. USWA President MacDonald stated his preference for the arbitration of contracts instead of "the hazards of strike and the cost of lost work to the

⁹⁶ Steelworker, March 6, 1954, p. 4.

⁹⁷ Steelworker, January 2, 1954, p. 2.

⁹⁸ Steelworker, March 6, 1954, p. 3.

⁹⁹ Teamwork, Vol. 10, No. 109, May, 1954.

participants."¹⁰⁰ The Canadian Director of USWA asserted that equality within the steel industry could be achieved through "perfect[ing] our collective bargaining machinery."¹⁰¹ To this end, the union sponsored bargaining and policy conferences which included the participation of human relations experts whose main message was that negative attitudes were the principal obstacle standing between unions and employers.¹⁰²

E) Wage Parity Won ... And Lost

In preparation for the 1954 basic steel negotiations, the union's head office in Toronto announced that it would demand a "national wage" increase of 8.5 cents along with other benefits. However, the announcement referred only to the "big two" negotiations at Algoma and STELCO rather than the usual "big three" negotiations which included DOSCO. Nor was mention made of the erosion of base wage parity between Sydney and the basic industry in Ontario or of the union's intention to restore it. As of June 1, 1953 DOSCO's base wage was \$1.40 with a 5 cent differential between job classes, but STELCO and Algoma's was \$1.43 with a 5 to 7 cent differential.¹⁰³ The slight at the Sydney industry and local 1064 was a reflection of the faster growth taking place in the Ontario sector and recent difficulties faced by

¹⁰⁰ Steel Labour, February, 1954, p. 3.

¹⁰¹ USWA National Wage and Policy Conference, Toronto, September 18-9, 1952, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹⁰² Steel Labour, Vol. XIX, March, 1954, p. 10.

¹⁰³ Steel Labour, Vol. XVIII, August, 1953, p. 1; October, 1953, p. 3.

the Sydney plant. While employment at Sydney had declined, the Labour Gazette reported that 18,400 new jobs were created in the Ontario sector of the industry in the post-war years.¹⁰⁴ However, although DOSCO was losing ground to its competitors, DOSCO President Forsyth was to report profits of approximately \$3 million for 1954 and 1955.¹⁰⁵

While negotiations proceeded at Algoma and STELCO, the Sydney local was "more or less marking time" pending developments in Ontario.¹⁰⁶ As in previous negotiations, talks between the union and the companies were unsuccessfully concluded, and conciliation was once again invoked as a means of obtaining a contract. Because the conciliation process was a necessary step in the negotiation process, a very rigid negotiation strategy was adopted by both sides prior to conciliation. The hope of the union membership was that the conciliation board would recommend in their favour. As a result, real negotiations under such circumstances would not begin until the conciliation phase.¹⁰⁷

Due to Sydney's place in the pattern bargaining strategy, the conciliation board for the Sydney local was not named until several months after direct negotiations ended at STELCO and Algoma.¹⁰⁸ These delays frustrated workers in Sydney, who

¹⁰⁴ Labour Gazette, Vol. 55, 1955, p. 647.

¹⁰⁵ Teamwork, Vol. 12, No. 131, May, 1956.

¹⁰⁶ Nicholson to Mahoney, July 7, 1954, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹⁰⁷ Stuart Jamieson, Industrial Relations in Canada (2nd edition), Toronto: MacMillan, 1973, p. 127.

¹⁰⁸ Post-Record (Sydney), September 15, 1954.

were anxious to see full parity restored. A resolution put forth at a local 1064 meeting made a call to have "the big 3 in steel stick together in a strike till all are able to settle." This was intended to strengthen the position of the union by threatening a national steel strike as well as to allow the local to play an equal role alongside the other two locals. This strategy was opposed by the local executive and its supporters. Local President O'Neil stated that while he had supported the unified approach to bargaining in the past, he now saw

difficulties in carrying it through. For instance, if one plant agreed to the full demands it would be hard to get the workers on that plant to strike to enforce demands elsewhere. On any offer short of the full demands any local would have to get the approval of the Policy Committee before accepting, and all three locals have equal representatives on the Policy Committee.¹⁰⁹

This conservative approach by the local president explains why many local 1064 members were unwilling to support O'Neil as president even though the local was in the midst of negotiations. In a close three-way race with Martin Merner and oppositionist Jim Ryan, O'Neil was re-elected president by a small margin, with Ryan coming in third.¹¹⁰

Other events also indicated that DOSCO workers were no longer playing a central role in steel industry negotiations. For instance, when the two Ontario locals took a strike vote as a means of pressuring the companies and the conciliation boards,

¹⁰⁹ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, August 25, 1954.

¹¹⁰ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, June 23, 1954.

local 1064 held no such vote.¹¹¹ Local 1064 awaited the outcome of conciliation hearings on the STELCO case, but not without objections from local oppositionists. The president of local 1064 had to address rumours that the executive was delaying board hearings "so as to sell a cheap contract." He insisted that this was done on the advice of the national office in recognition of the advantages of following the pattern set by STELCO.¹¹² When the conciliation board concluded with a recommendation of a five-cent increase for STELCO workers, the Canadian Director admitted to the USWA President that the agreement resulting from it was not a great victory: "You will readily understand why we are not going overboard on any announcement of victory, though I'm glad to say that we received very good treatment from the press in this respect."¹¹³

The main objective of the leadership had been the winning of a contract without a strike. The Canadian Director stated in a letter to the international president that: "Aside from the heavy cost to the international that such a strike might mean, there is from my own experience, the question of the physical and mental strain of such an operation."¹¹⁴ This suggests that there was some pressure to conserve union finances after the recent big strike in the American steel industry as well as a personal

¹¹¹ Post-Record (Sydney), July 9, 1954. It should be noted that by 1953 there was less detail in the minutes. Decisions were recorded, but little was reported about discussions and debates on various issues.

¹¹² USWA Local USWA Minutes, September 22, 1954.

¹¹³ Millard to MacDonald, September 3, 1954, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹¹⁴ Millard to MacDonald, September 3, 1954, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

reluctance on the part of Millard. That it was done at the expense of Canadian steel workers was not an overriding concern for the union's Canadian Director.

The Canadian Director bemoaned the fact that there was no contract yet at Sydney. He stated that the situation in Sydney was much worse:

- (a) because the company is much less able to pay, and
- (b) because there is large-scale unemployment with practically no job opportunities in the Maritime area.... yet we must do everything we can to keep this segment of the industry on a wage level with the others in Canada or we weaken our policy of parity.¹¹⁵

Indeed, DOSCO claimed that the demand for steel was slackening and actually announced temporary closure of the rail mill.¹¹⁶ Clearly, the unevenness within the industry was becoming an increasing problem for the union's pattern bargaining strategy.

The conciliation hearings at Sydney continued until early December when the Conciliation Board made a unanimous recommendation of a five-cent increase over two years for Sydney steel workers instead of the one-year contract that Algoma and STELCO workers had negotiated. At a local 1064 meeting, the executive recommended acceptance of the proposal, because the agreement would bring the local "into conformity with STELCO and Algoma."¹¹⁷ As in the last round of negotiations, no resolutions were permitted from the membership at the meeting so as

¹¹⁵ Millard to MacDonald, September 3, 1954, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹¹⁶ Post-Record (Sydney), September 16, October 29, 1954.

¹¹⁷ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, December 15, 1954.

to prevent a motion for strike action.¹¹⁸ Although the proposed agreement would bring only short-term parity since Algoma and STELCO workers would be entitled to negotiate further raises after the first year of the DOSCO agreement, George MacNeil did not join other oppositionists in what he called "cheap criticism" of the proposal. He argued that the offer was the best that could be achieved.¹¹⁹ This indicates that MacNeil was no longer playing the role of oppositional leader as he had in the past.

That the proposed contract was considered inadequate by many workers was suggested by President O'Neil's qualified support for it. He insisted that the executive was not trying "to sell" the contract, but he argued that to go further would mean a strike, something which he and other union leaders very much wanted to avoid. However, by this time, DOSCO had received steel orders from Britain, Mexico and West Germany and some workers thought they could do much better as a result.¹²⁰ When a member accused the executive of "selling" the union, the local president threatened that the member would be put "on charge" if he persisted.¹²¹

One of the more positive features of the proposed contract was the acceptance by the company of the job reclassification scheme (CWS) which the company claimed

¹¹⁸ Post-Record (Sydney), December 16, 1954; USWA Local 1064 Minutes, December 12, 1954.

¹¹⁹ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, December 15, 1954.

¹²⁰ Post-Record (Sydney), December 3, 16, 1954.

¹²¹ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, December 15, 1954.

would mean more pay for workers.¹²² The proposed contract was approved by a four-to-one majority, but almost 1,000 workers declined to vote on it.¹²³ This suggests the presence of some strong minority opposition to the contract as well as cynicism about the negotiation process and the hopes of obtaining parity under the present leadership. Clearly, the recommendation of acceptance by the union leadership and their announcement of the improbability of obtaining a better agreement was a message to workers that their leaders were not prepared to lead a strike.

Negotiations during the remainder of the decade were completed without reliance on the conciliation process. Conciliation boards were increasingly being seen by unions, employers and the state as ineffective since they produced longer delays in reaching settlements. This resulted in increased frustration among workers, which sometimes led to spontaneous strikes.¹²⁴ A pattern bargaining strategy, which was coordinated through a centralized negotiations committee headed by the Canadian Director, was still in effect.¹²⁵ However, in the 1956 negotiations, DOSCO workers won an eight-cent increase, but were unable to keep pace with STELCO and Algoma workers who, after voting overwhelming for strike, won a 33-cent package over two

¹²² Post-Record (Sydney), December 13, 1954. It was later reported that the CWS took two years to complete, but brought a 15-cent boost in wage rates at Sydney and back-pay averaging \$200.00 per worker. See Steel Labour, Vol. XX, July, 1955, p. 5.

¹²³ Post-Record (Sydney), December 22, 1954; USWA Local 1064 Minutes, December 22, 1954.

¹²⁴ Stuart Jamieson, 1973. op. cit., p. 126.

¹²⁵ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, June 6, 1956.

years. Remarkably, in this round of negotiations, local 1064 settled even before the STELCO and Algoma locals, breaking the pattern bargaining strategy completely.¹²⁶ The DOSCO contract was approved by a vote of 1,678 to 1,037 which indicated much dissatisfaction with the contract.¹²⁷ Dissent within the Sydney local increased to the point where executive members and their supporters protested that there was "too much criticism towards [the] executive".¹²⁸ This was despite the fact that the executive had been elected only three months previously with Martin Merner, a long-time member of the executive, winning a close three-way race for the presidency.¹²⁹ Probably as much for his tough stand against militants and his loyalty to the leadership, as his ability, ex-president O'Neil was immediately given a job as USWA field representative in Nova Scotia with responsibility for the Sydney local.¹³⁰

In the 1957 negotiations, local 1064 won a 16-cent increase over two years, as well as a commitment by the company that it would pay whatever additional increase was needed after the first year to ensure that the gap between the DOSCO and STELCO base wage would not increase beyond six cents.¹³¹ The contract, which in

¹²⁶ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, July 18, 1956.

¹²⁷ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, July 11, 1956. Parity between Stelco and Algoma was also eroded as the former's base wage rate was increased two cents above that of Algoma workers. See Steel labour, Vol. XXI, July, September, 1956.

¹²⁸ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, October 10, 1956.

¹²⁹ USWA Local 1064 Meetings, June 13, 1956.

¹³⁰ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, June 27, 1956.

¹³¹ Steel Labour, Vol. XXII, August, 1957, p. 3.

a sense acknowledged the futility of seeking parity with Ontario steel workers, was ratified by a slim margin.¹³² DOSCO apparently could afford such an agreement since it reported record-breaking profits in 1956 of over \$7 million.¹³³ This situation produced greater dissatisfaction among the membership who replaced incumbent president Martin Merner with one-time oppositionist leader and ex-president George MacNeil in a close four-way race.¹³⁴

The 1958 negotiations between STELCO and local 1005 broke down, and the workers struck for the first time in 12 years. The STELCO strike was, according to the new Canadian Director, William Mahoney, intended to establish "a necessary pattern-setting job that will be reflected across all Canadian industry."¹³⁵ However, before the strike ended, Algoma workers reached an agreement with the employer. This, according to Steel Labour, was because of strong conciliators and reasonable negotiators.¹³⁶ As for DOSCO, it was not negotiating that year, but measures were being taken to remove it even further from the pattern bargaining within the basic steel industry. When A.V.Roe, a subsidiary of the British-based Hawker Siddeley

¹³² USWA Local 1064 Minutes, July 31, 1957.

¹³³ Teamwork, May, 1957, Beaton Institute.

¹³⁴ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, June 11, 1958. It was rumoured that former local 1064 president Ed Corbett was to run for the presidency, but he was discouraged from doing so by both the incumbent local leadership and the national leadership. However, Corbett stated that he had no intention of seeking the presidency since he "could never stand the intrigue that seems to be part of the stock in trade of this union." See Corbett to Mahoney, March 9, 1958, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹³⁵ Steel Labour, Vol. XXIII, August, 1958,; Labour Gazette, Vol 59, 1959, p. 235.

¹³⁶ Steel Labour, Vol. XXIII, November, 1958.

Corporation, took control of DOSCO in 1957, the union set up a national DOSCO negotiating committee that was to coordinate negotiations among the DOSCO subsidiaries. Forever wishing to get employer-employee relations off to a good start, District Director Nicholson stated that he was "looking forward" to the A.V. Roe take-over of DOSCO and that he expected that it would lead to new plants and a stronger economy.¹³⁷

As the leader within the "DOSCO chain", the Sydney local was expected to be a leader in negotiations among DOSCO subsidiaries even though it was still considered part of basic steel and to be following the pattern set by STELCO. The Canadian Director made it clear he wanted someone from head office included in all final DOSCO negotiations so as to insure uniformity in bargaining positions.¹³⁸ The 1959 contract negotiations between local 1064 and DOSCO were the first under this new arrangement. The accommodationist approach of the local executive to negotiations persisted even with former oppositionist George MacNeil as president. The local leadership began by notifying the Canadian Director of its negotiating objectives, but emphasized that considerable compromise is likely and "it is better that too much publicity is not given to the original submission."¹³⁹ Furthermore, with no apparent thought to the possibility of strike action against DOSCO, the local 1064 membership voted in the midst of its own negotiations to donate \$1,000 per week to

¹³⁷ USWA National Wage and Policy Conference. Winnipeg, April 17-8, 1958, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹³⁸ Dosco National Committee. Minutes, August 15, 1958, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹³⁹ MacInnis to Mahoney, July 10, 1959, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

striking U.S. steel workers.¹⁴⁰

When the executive brought a tentative settlement to a meeting of steel workers, considerable opposition was voiced because the proposed contract did not achieve parity with STELCO and Algoma. It was also a three-year contract, the first in the history of the union. As in past negotiations, no resolutions were allowed from the membership at the meeting as a means of preventing a ground-swell of support for a militant opposition position.¹⁴¹ Despite this and the much publicized deteriorating competitive position of DOSCO, the workers rejected the offer by a slim margin. When the union leadership later brought another offer to the membership for a vote it warned the membership through the local media that another rejection "would be tantamount to a strike vote."¹⁴² The executive acknowledged that "there was a feeling that [the] executive were trying to sell [the] contract", but it emphasized that the new offer was not "an executive contract" and that it had the approval of the district and national directors. To ensure that the contract was accepted on the next vote, the executive members went to the "committee men" in the various departments to explain the "real meaning" of the contract.¹⁴³ This lobbying by the executive, along with a significant number of no-votes was enough to have the offer accepted by

¹⁴⁰ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, August 12, 1959.

¹⁴¹ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, August 16, 1959.

¹⁴² Halifax Herald, September 9, 1959.

¹⁴³ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, August 26, 1959.

a substantial margin.¹⁴⁴

The contract and the discontent surrounding it resulted in the defeat of George MacNeil and the return of Martin Merner as local president. The credibility of the former as a clear choice for oppositionists had been damaged by his apparent alliance with the union establishment. This was confirmed by the fact that he was opposed by oppositionist Jim Ryan in the 1960 local election. It was significant that together MacNeil and Ryan won a majority of the votes for president in this election, indicating the marginal popularity of Merner, the mainstream establishment candidate.¹⁴⁵ By the late 1950's, Jim Ryan had become the leading oppositionist within the Sydney local. Neither a communist nor a member of the CCF, he was more acceptable to unionists of various political orientations who saw him as a capable militant leader. Ryan represented a second generation of oppositionists who became active in the union in the immediate post-war period. The collapse of the communists as an influential organized force within the union made way for the reconstitution of the opposition as a loosely organized and diverse collection of militants with Ryan as their choice for president.

F) Promoting "Responsible" Unionism by Restricting Democracy

The conservative political culture within the USWA, based on the practice of

¹⁴⁴ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, September 2, 16, 1959; Steel Labour, Vol. XXIV, November, 1959, p. 3.

¹⁴⁵ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, June 29, 1960.

"responsible" unionism and the winning of "industrial democracy", became more firmly established within the union as the 1950's progressed. The union leadership demonstrated a willingness to cooperate with the employer to the point of denying the existence of any essential conflict of interest between labour and capital. In his Labour Day message on "The Real Meaning of Labour Day", International President MacDonald espoused the concept of "mutual trusteeship" which saw union and business leaders as entrusted with the destiny of each other and the public at large. They are "partners in the task of production," he stated, and without such a relationship industrial life would be "chaotic" he warned. Such a relationship, MacDonald asserted:

... encourages a more wholesome spirit in the plant. It fosters better understanding of mutual problems. It results in better production. Conversely we know that profits are the life-blood of industry; that management has an obligation to provide a return to investors. We know that corporate leaders have the right to invest their savings, experience and talents in productive industry and to enjoy all the other rights and privileges of free men.¹⁴⁶

The union's international leadership actually spoke of the possibility of a "strike-free" industry and "labour-management peace". To this end it set up the Wage Policy Committee which consisted of approximately two hundred district and local leaders and was designed to guide wage policy and negotiations. If the committee was successful, President MacDonald predicted, "We will have seen the last of the great

¹⁴⁶ Steel Labour, Vol. XXIII, September, 1956.

steel strikes."¹⁴⁷ This perspective was not out of step with the Canadian leadership. Canadian Director Mahoney viewed this Committee, which concentrated much power in the hands of so few members of the union, as an "example of democracy at work."¹⁴⁸ Undoubtedly this was because he and the two Canadian Directors participated in the Committee. MacDonald and his administration were praised in both the Canadian and American editions of Steel Labour for combining "responsible unionism with the needs of members."¹⁴⁹

In addition to the increasing accommodation with the employers, the union leadership showed a greater determination to purge or marginalize oppositional elements. For instance, at the 1954 international convention in Atlantic City, communists were banned from even holding membership in the USWA, a measure that was not objected to by the Canadian leadership.¹⁵⁰ But the suppression of dissent extended beyond the undemocratic treatment of communists. When the USWA president was challenged by oppositionist candidate Donald Rarick for the position of president, the challenger and his supporters were given no opportunity to put forward their criticisms of the administration. Neither were their alternative policies given voice in the pages of Steel Labour or any other union publication controlled by the

¹⁴⁷ Steel Labour, Vol. XXV, February, April, May, 1960.

¹⁴⁸ Steel Labour, Vol. XXIV, June, 1959,.

¹⁴⁹ Steel Labour, Vol. XXIII, October, 1956. Steel Labour was silent, however, when at the International Convention in Los Angeles, Canadian delegates had to muster every bit of possible support to defeat a motion by President MacDonald to abolish the position of Canadian Director. See Labour Gazette, Vol. 56, 1956, p. 1237.

¹⁵⁰ Steel Labour, Vol. XIX, October, 1954.

established leadership. Even when Rarick received one third of the votes, he was afforded no opportunity to counter the attacks made against him by the union leadership. Instead, the "unknown shop steward", who focused his challenge on the undemocratic way in which dues and union salaries were increased, felt the full wrath of the union administration who called him a "traitor".¹⁵¹

The ability of the union's international leadership to call on the large number of paid staff people as well as loyal supporters in the locals was key to defeating such opposition. For example, in preparation for an impending confrontation at the convention, according to John Herling, MacDonald saw to it that hundreds of paid staff were chosen as representatives to the convention. He let it be known that if he "went down," so would they. At the convention MacDonald and his supporters used red-baiting tactics and called for the convention "to rip this cancer out of your bowels." However, he also found it necessary to retreat from his "mutual trusteeship" program and to call for more aggressiveness in negotiations. Not surprisingly, the convention voted to begin expulsion proceedings against Rarick and some of his key supporters.¹⁵²

Despite the purging or marginalizing of communists and other oppositionists, questions relating to union goals and union democracy continued to be raised and debated by local union members who advocated more militancy towards the employer and more democracy within the union. But the opposition's resolutions and concerns

¹⁵¹ John Herling's Labour Letter, September 27, 1958, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹⁵² Ibid.

did not usually make it past the local level. Such was the case with a resolution from the local 1064 opposition which advocated that Canada trade with the People's Republic of China. It was defeated by the executive and their supporters who refused to support any resolution recognizing "red China".¹⁵³ Another resolution was debated but defeated on constitutional grounds when it called for the legalizing of the Communist Party.¹⁵⁴ Another issue taken up by some local activists was national autonomy for the Canadian section of the union. But when a resolution calling for a Canadian USWA Convention was put forward, it was also dismissed on constitutional grounds.¹⁵⁵ Elsewhere within the Canadian USWA, steel workers were also calling for more Canadian autonomy or outright independence. A letter from the recording secretary of a small Amherst, Nova Scotia local to Gower Markle of the National office stated that "Members here feel that labour is now strong enough in Canada to stand on its own feet and be entirely independent of the United States.... just as Canada is a sovereign independent nation so let our labour organizations be the same."¹⁵⁶ In his reply, Markle argued that the benefits of the international outweighed any restrictions on the independence of Canadian members.¹⁵⁷

The support for autonomy was widespread enough throughout the Canadian

¹⁵³ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, August 25, 1954.

¹⁵⁴ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, January 5, 1955.

¹⁵⁵ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, January 5, 1955.

¹⁵⁶ LeBlanc to Markle, October 17, 1956, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹⁵⁷ Markle to LeBlanc, October 25, 1956, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

sector of the union that international Secretary-Treasurer I.W. Abel addressed the issue at the 1955 Canadian policy conference. He not only argued for international as opposed to national unionism, but implied that unionists advocating autonomy were irresponsible because they would deviate from the union's practice of compromise, which made the USWA "one of the most responsible organizations in the labour movement." The union was responsible not only to the members, he stated, "but to our communities and our nation and to workers throughout the world."¹⁵⁸ The Canadian and American leadership were closely allied on the issue of autonomy. Sycophantic resolutions or remarks commending the international officers for their great leadership were quite common at Canadian Policy Conferences. One such example came from Canadian Director Charles Millard, who thanked Abel for attending the conference and expressed the hope "that we can justify the confidence they have shown in all of us in Canada."¹⁵⁹

"Responsible" unionism was enthusiastically practised by the leadership in Canada. When the president of DOSCO asked the Canadian Director for a letter which stated the latter's intention to cooperate with the company and thereby dispel "an illusion" of hostility between DOSCO management and the union leadership, Millard replied that he was "happy to say" that "a very welcome attitude of mutual

¹⁵⁸ USWA National Wage and Policy Conference, Hamilton, January 30-31, February 1, 1955, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

respect and understanding has been growing in our union-management relations."¹⁶⁰

It was later stated that Millard's "public exchange of letters with the late Lionel Forsyth ... broke new ground in union-management relations field."¹⁶¹ This position was in keeping with the USWA President's "mutual trusteeship" approach which Millard greatly admired.¹⁶² It was continued under the leadership of William Mahoney who succeeded Millard as Canadian Director in 1956. For instance, Mahoney approached the president of STELCO with the aim of discussing "our mutual problems....on or off the record." "Such discussions between responsible people", he stated, "need not compromise in any way basic principles held by either party which are quite often more apparently in conflict than apart in basic purpose and long term goals."¹⁶³

As a result of such policies, the union became more insular in its dealings with other unions, especially where strike support action was concerned. For example, when Local 1064 President O'Neil inquired of the National office about sending support to striking U.A.W. locals, it was suggested instead that strike support contributions be sent to striking Algoma or U.S. steel workers.¹⁶⁴ The practice of

¹⁶⁰ Forsyth to Millard, February 23, 1955, MG 28 I 268, NAC; Millard to Forsyth, March 10, 1955, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹⁶¹ Teamwork, Vol 13, January, 1957.

¹⁶² Millard to Howard Hague, November 1, 1954, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹⁶³ USWA Local 1005 1958 Strike Correspondence, Mahoney to H. G. Hilton, August 8, 1958, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹⁶⁴ Mahoney to O'Neil, November 24, 1955, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

"responsible" unionism also led to a greater fracturing of the Canadian section of the USWA and an erosion of solidarity among Canada's steel workers. Resolutions calling for the elimination of wage inequalities among steel workers based on geography and sector were passed at policy conferences, but no specific actions were taken by the leadership to implement the resolutions. Resolutions from locals 1064 and 1231, which called for "unified negotiations", were revised by the resolutions committee so as not to upset the STELCO-led pattern that had been established.¹⁶⁵ The national leadership wanted to avoid a repeat of the 1946 strike while acknowledging the union policy of maintaining parity.

Union officials also marshalled support at the policy conferences to defeat resolutions calling for provincial councils and other networks that would improve the horizontal links among locals.¹⁶⁶ Montreal locals continued to call for an area council which had been established earlier and then disbanded by order from the District Director.¹⁶⁷ Such councils were vitally important to the opposition because they offered a potential forum for oppositionists to meet and begin to promote alternative policies and strategies within the USWA.

A critical issue for many activists in the union was the question of its

¹⁶⁵ USWA National Wage and Policy Conference, Hamilton, January 30-31, February 1, 1955, MG 28 I 268, NAC; USWA National Wage and Policy Conference, Toronto, April 19-20, 1956, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹⁶⁶ USWA National Wage and Policy Conference, Hamilton, January 30-31, February 1, 1955, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹⁶⁷ USWA National Wage and Policy Conference, Toronto, April 19-20, 1956, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

preparedness to strike against the employer if necessary. The National Welfare Fund, a euphemism for the strike fund, was controlled entirely by the international office. It was financed at what was considered by many to be a conservative level (only five cents per capita per month), and participation in the fund was only on a voluntary basis. Despite pressure from those locals that contributed to the fund, the international leadership refused to make it compulsory or to increase the dues levy, because some locals threatened to leave the international if this were done. However, because of the low per capita levy and the less-than-perfect participation rate in the fund, it was said to be difficult to accumulate enough resources to launch successful and large-scale strikes.¹⁶⁸

The Canadian leadership took a conservative position on the issue by siding with the more passive membership in the union. In 1955 at the national policy conference, five resolutions calling for a strengthening of the fund were defeated or ignored by referring them without recommendation to either the international executive or the international convention.¹⁶⁹ At the 1956 national policy conference, the same resolutions on the welfare fund were again put forward with the same

¹⁶⁸ USWA National and Wage Policy Conference, Hamilton, January 30-31, February 1, 1955, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

result.¹⁷⁰ Finally, in 1959, the National Welfare Fund per capita contribution was increased from five to ten cents per month, although attempts to have the name of the fund changed to reflect the fact that it was a strike fund were unsuccessful, since a special "strike fund" was contrary to the policy of the international. Undoubtedly, the decision to enlarge the fund was due to the strike by the steel workers at STELCO in 1958 and a large-scale strike of American steel workers the following year.¹⁷¹

The enlargement of the strike fund and the willingness of some workers to strike by no means removed the internal obstacles to strike action. Delegates to the national policy conferences were repeatedly reminded of the need for authorization before striking.¹⁷² Apparently, this was enough of a problem that Larry Sefton, Director of District 6, wrote to all locals and staff representatives in the district complaining that locals were not following the proper procedure for striking. He reminded them that the written approval of the International President or the District Director was required in order to strike. Sefton stressed that the reason for giving "adequate notice of a pending strike" was "so my office can intervene to affect a

¹⁷⁰ USWA National Wage and Policy Conference, Toronto, April 19-20, 1956, MG 28 I 268, NAC. Evidence that the financial burden of the proposed per capita increase was not the principal issue is suggested by the fact that the leadership was able to push through a resolution increasing the per capita contribution to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) at the policy conference the following year. See USWA National Wage and Policy Conference, Montreal, April 25-7, 1957, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹⁷¹ USWA National Wage and Policy Conference, Toronto, June 4-5, 1959, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹⁷² USWA National Wage and Policy Conference, Toronto, June 4-5, 1959, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

settlement if possible."¹⁷³

The national leadership's resistance to progressive change continued under William Mahoney who had served as Assistant Director and close ally to Millard.¹⁷⁴ Mahoney pursued the same goals and upheld the same practices as Millard, including a firm opposition to communists and a tendency to discourage rank-and-file participation in the union's structures beyond the local level. This was illustrated when Mahoney unilaterally announced a change in representation at the National Policy Conference from one delegate for every 500 members of a local to one delegate for 1,000 members. This was quite a provocative move since some activists had been attempting to get even greater representation at the annual conferences.¹⁷⁵ Like Millard, Mahoney encouraged and cultivated "responsible" union leaders and marginalized those who were considered "irresponsible". But he also understood that a militant posture was required at particular moments in order to win legitimacy from the membership. He spoke of the need for "victory through solidarity", although in practice emphasis was placed more on solidarity between elected leaders and the rank and file based on the loyalty of the latter.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ Larry Sefton to all local Unions and Staff Representatives of District 6, circa 1959, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹⁷⁴ Millard's legacy was still a contentious issue within the union at the time of his departure. When a resolution was put before local 1064 asking for a donation of \$100 for a gift for the departing Millard, it generated "lengthy discussion pro and con on the merits of Charlie Millard as our National Director." See USWA Local 1064 Minutes, September 5, 1956.

¹⁷⁵ National Wage and Policy Conference, 1957, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹⁷⁶ Steel Labour, Vol. XXIII, December 1958, Vol. XXV, February 1960.

"Responsible" unionism, based on respect for the rights of the employer, included a special appreciation for so-called enlightened employers. For example, on the occasion of the death of DOSCO president Forsyth, District Director Nicholson stated that better union-management relations occurred "because of the new labour relations policy of the late Lionel A. Forsyth" and that "the passing of Mr. Forsyth removes from our midst a man of outstanding leadership and ability, an industrial leader who, in dealing with organized labour, has achieved an enviable reputation."¹⁷⁷ This attitude was reciprocated by Forsyth's successor, C.B. Lang, who stated that, "the leaders of the unions representing our employees are aware of the serious inflationary effects that result when labour costs rise at a faster rate than the productivity of the work force." However, his one caveat was that "this awareness must be extended to the rank and file worker as well."¹⁷⁸ This spirit of cooperation was also demonstrated at the local level when local 1064 officials invited DOSCO representatives to a banquet that ended a weekend union workshop.¹⁷⁹

Overall, the moderate and accommodationist approach by the leadership produced modest results in improving the material benefits to workers when one considers the possibilities that presented themselves to the union. The unprecedented expansion in the industry, especially in Ontario, offered opportunities for wage and other improvements that were not aggressively pursued. The limited success of the

¹⁷⁷ USWA National Wage and Policy Conference, Montreal, April 25-7, 1957, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹⁷⁸ Teamwork, Vol. XIII, May, 1957.

¹⁷⁹ Steel Labour, Vol. XXII, February, 1957.

Canadian USWA in negotiations was reflected in the contradictory messages it presented about its accomplishments. While in the pages of Steel Labour, it proudly reported to its members that wages in basic steel increased 136.5% between 1946 and 1956, in a presentation to the Royal Commission on Canada's Economic Prospects it pointed out that labour's share of the value of output in the industry fell from 33% in 1946 to 24% in 1956 and that the \$1.12 in wage increases were more than offset by rises in productivity, a fact it neglected to mention in Steel Labour.¹⁸⁰

G) Conclusion

Throughout the 1950's, important changes had taken place within local 1064. The opposition had been weakened considerably, but not entirely suppressed by the anti-communist leadership and the cold-war environment which encouraged it. Communists were no longer an organized and significant element among oppositional forces within the local, because the concerted effort by the established leadership to discredit and marginalize communists and their close allies was largely successful in the early 1950's. In so far as Michels associates oligarchy with a lack of opposition, it is to this period in the union's history that most aptly applies Michels' idea of the effects of oligarchy. During those years the established leadership, and the policies and strategies it upheld, were virtually unchallenged. That the oligarchical and undemocratic thrust by the union leadership was facilitated by an expanding economy

¹⁸⁰ Steel Labour, Vol. XXIII, June, 1958; USWA Report of March 16, 1959, MG 19, 7, D3, Beaton Institute.

and economic concessions to the steel workers, and justified by the need for "responsible" and anti-communist unionism, lends support to a marxist perspective.

However, this period of relative worker acquiescence was quite brief as rank and file opposition re-emerged in the mid-1950's. The re-emergence and persistence of oppositional activity brings to mind Gouldner's argument about an "iron law of democracy". In this instance the new thrust for greater democracy and new union policies were led by a politically eclectic group of workers who had become active wit' in the union in the immediate post-war period and who represented a variety of political ideologies. They were successful in organizing more effective opposition to the established leadership, which led to the temporary removal of Martin Merner as local president.

This situation paralleled that at STELCO's local 1005. The opposition to the CCF right-wing faction which had dominated local 1005 since 1950 gathered strength rather quickly after the defeat of the STELCO workers in the 1958 strike over monetary issues. The unimpressive display of leadership by the union staff and the elected officials quickly resulted in the emergence of a left-wing faction that openly challenged the established leadership. Unlike the new opposition leaders at Sydney, the STELCO left-wing leaders were skilled trades people, some of whom were recent immigrants from Britain.¹⁸¹ Several key Sydney oppositionists were semi-skilled workers who had laboured for years in the General Yard Department and had no craft-based affinity to the established leaders.

¹⁸¹ Bill Freeman, 1982, *op. cit.*, pp. 81-89.

Many workers at Sydney continued to believe that they had not shared equally with other Canadian steel workers in the benefits won by "industrial democracy" throughout the 1950's. Some of them wanted to return to the "unified negotiations" that were established in 1946 and thereby resisted attempts by the employers and the state to divide them from steel workers in Ontario. This was seen as unrealistic by the national and international leadership, which opted for pattern bargaining, led by the STELCO local. But even this latter strategy was not pursued aggressively by the national and local leadership from the perspective of oppositionists in local 1064.

Although the relatively weak position of DOSCO undermined the struggle for parity, the opposition did not want to relinquish it without at least testing the company through strike action. Oppositionists stressed the fact that throughout the 1950's DOSCO was still making a profit and the Sydney steel workers were doing the same work as Ontario steel workers. Many of them believed that they should be getting the same wage as their Ontario counterparts. This view was resisted by the USWA leadership, which became convinced of the impossibility of closing the wage gap through greater solidarity and determined action by steel workers. Rather than mobilize workers to fight for parity, in the early 1950's the union leadership embraced conciliation as a way of winning contracts that were made saleable to the majority of workers. This led to a demobilization of steel workers in Sydney and elsewhere and accounted in part for their lack of major strike action during the rest of the decade. This period corresponds to Offe's third phase of union development in which the organization is most reliant on the legal supports provided by the state. The

union's reliance on external forces such as the state and its reluctance to mobilize the membership also relates to Mills' argument about union leaders as "New Men of Power" who come to associate most easily with the members of other elites instead of union members. However, both Mills and Offe are silent about role of oppositional activity.

Despite the anti-communist offensive of the late 1940's and 1950's which decimated their ranks, oppositionists reconstituted themselves by the late 1950's and challenged the established leadership of the local. This situation differed from that of the UAW, where the left-wing faction persistently challenged the established leadership throughout the 1950's. However, according to Yates, it also experienced some erosion at the national level and especially within the District Council due to the persistent anti-communist environment, the prosperity of the period and the leadership's success in its more limited approach to the state on specific issues. Nonetheless, key UAW locals continued to be led by left-wing unionists.¹⁸² The re-election of left-wing opposition leaders was not achieved in local 1064 in this period as it was in local 1005 and the Canadian UAW, which indicates the unevenness of the move towards renewed union militancy and democracy. Nevertheless the renewal of the opposition demonstrated the dissatisfaction with "responsible" unionism and "industrial democracy" as it had evolved at Sydney. Conflict around these developments were to intensify in the 1960's.

¹⁸² Charlotte Yates, 1993, *op. cit.*, pp. 111-117.

Chapter VIII

THE CRISIS OF "RESPONSIBLE UNIONISM" AND THE REBIRTH OF MILITANCY, 1960-1966

A) Introduction

By the beginning of the 1960's, both the coal and steel industries of Cape Breton were in crisis and DOSCO's competitive position had worsened relative to other Canadian steel producers. In response to this situation, DOSCO implemented a two-pronged strategy: to concentrate more of its steel production facilities in central Canada where its major domestic markets were located; and to increase the cost-efficiency and profitability of its Nova Scotia operations. During the post-1936 period, the company had on occasion introduced changes in the production process which were designed to produce more steel with fewer workers. However, the early 1960's witnessed even more aggressive corporate measures in this direction. This presented the workers, the union leadership and the larger community with a new kind of challenge. It called into question the survival of the industry as well as the future prospects of the community that depended on it.

The attempt to introduce widespread efficiency measures challenged the terms of industrial democracy and the post-war compromise that had been negotiated in the post-war period. In so doing, the employer precipitated a widespread revolt among the steel workers. It also created a crisis within the union itself since the revolt was led by militant oppositionists who had also opposed the accommodationist practices

and policies of the established leadership. The established leaders who advocated "responsible unionism" were unprepared to deal with such a crisis. Whereas previous efficiency measures were introduced without broad based worker opposition, those of the early 1960's met with widespread strike action that defied the union leadership as well as the employer.

These events marked the resurgence of strong oppositional forces which were led by a loosely organized and politically eclectic group of workers. Although these forces were becoming strong enough to seriously challenge the established leadership, they were not yet powerful enough to soundly defeat it. The inability of this group to defeat the established leadership in elections and establish its own regime was due in part to its lack of organization and in part to the crisis within the industry.

B) Rank and File Rebellion

By the early 1960's, it was clear that the Nova Scotia steel industry was stagnating and entering a period of decline. It had certainly not kept pace with the steel producers of Ontario. According to A.V. Roe President, Crawford Gordon, production at Sydney had increased only 42% between 1947 and 1960 while in the same period production at the Hamilton based Dominion Foundry and Steel Company (Dofasco) had increased by 222%, Algoma's by 141%, and STELCO's by 101%.¹ According to District Director Nicholson, the situation was serious enough that "a far reaching programme, something out of the ordinary" was needed to revive the

¹ Doane Curtis Papers, MG 19. 1, Box 2, Beaton Institute

industry.² The announcement by DOSCO that it would build a new rolling mill in Contrecoeur, Quebec, added to the concern in the community as well as among the steel workers. A "rolling mill campaign" was launched by the union and community groups with the aim of convincing DOSCO and the federal government that the new rolling mills should be built at Sydney.³ DOSCO responded that for economic reasons, it would build the mills at Contrecoeur, but it tried to assure the steel workers and the rest of the community that the new mill would actually provide a secure market for unprocessed steel produced in Sydney.⁴ This assurance did not allay the fears of Sydney steel workers, especially as the company continued to lay off workers with announcements that there would be "wholesale pensioning" of steel workers and that the workforce would be reduced by about 1,000 workers in total. Some departments were already operating only five shifts a week and overall capacity was at only 67%.⁵

DOSCO's General Manager identified high labour costs and geographical factors as the two major obstacles that threatened the recovery of the industry. Without acknowledging the already existing wage differential between Ontario and Nova Scotia steel workers, he suggested that the labour movement must accept even larger wage disparities. As for the geographical factor, he indicated that the location

² Steel Labour, Vol. XXV, June, 1960, p. 40.

³ Post-Record (Sydney), February 16, 1961.

⁴ Post Record (Sydney), February 23, 1961.

⁵ Post-Record (Sydney), February 17, 18, March 2 and 18, 1961.

of the Sydney plant greatly handicapped the company's access to markets, especially those in Central Canada.⁶ In response to these two problems, the company chose a dual strategy. It began to shift more of its investment capital to central Canada as a way of dealing with its geographical disadvantage, while also implementing measures at the Sydney plant which were designed to reduce its wage bill.⁷

The part of the strategy that had the greatest immediate impact on Sydney steel workers consisted of demanding increased production and efficiency from the workers, while at the same time significantly reducing the workforce. This strategy was not based on the introduction of major technological innovation, but on an intensification of the exploitation of workers by combining jobs, working the employees harder and changing long-established work practices. Labour relations in the previous ten years had been considered "fairly good" by union representatives, but in December 1960 there occurred a "complete reversal" of DOSCO's former policies regarding work rules and industrial relations. The company "laid off" approximately 1,500 workers in the following year, denied vacation rights to many workers, and demanded overtime from others.⁸ DOSCO followed these actions with the hiring of "an American firm of consultants, who...attempted to bring about combinations of jobs and break long standing work rules that had been negotiated between the union and management." The consultants were part of the Proudfoot Company based in

⁶ Post-Record (Sydney), April 18, 1961.

⁷ USWA 1064 Local Minutes, September 27, October 4, 1961.

⁸ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, September 20, 1961.

New York and it was there that the "experts" commuted to on weekends.⁹ Their task was to suggest ways of reorganizing work in order to increase efficiency and reduce costs. This necessitated an on-site study of the Sydney operation and of particular work routines, job descriptions and schedules.¹⁰

The employer initiative was strongly resisted by the steel workers from the beginning. A "walk out" of 500 steel workers took place when the "expert schedulers" arrived at the plant's electrical shop. The workers protested that the "experts" should be kept out of the mill until negotiations then taking place in Montreal were completed. Furthermore, they claimed that their presence was a safety hazard since they were "hovering over the workmen."¹¹ Local 1064 president Martin Merner supported this action by publicly stating that the steel workers, "must protect our work rules even if it means stopping work."¹² However, after he and other union representatives held talks with company officials, he urged the strikers to return to work. After much discussion, the workers voted to do so, but by this time the strike had affected all plant departments as other steel workers struck in sympathy with the electrical repair workers.¹³

The local 1064 President then stressed that the USWA was a "responsible

⁹ The great deal of expense involved in bringing in these consultants undoubtedly further infuriated the workers.

¹⁰ Post-Record (Sydney), October 11, 1961.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² USWA Local 1064 Minutes, October 4, 11, 1961.

¹³ Post-Record (Sydney), October 10, 12, 1961.

organization" and tried to dissuade the membership from further strike action. He told the membership that DOSCO officials were determined that "Proudfoot and Company" restore the plant to a sound economic footing.¹⁴ The president of local 1064 stressed that any grievance coming about as a result of the company's recent measures would be handled with the direct assistance of representatives from the national office's industrial engineering and legislative departments. The directors of the two union departments indicated that they would give this problem their undivided attention.¹⁵ They attempted to reassure the members by pointing out that this kind of "efficiency drive" had been experienced earlier in the United States as well as at both Algoma and Hamilton.¹⁶ The difference between Sydney and other plants, according to them, was that in other plants, such measures were implemented, "at a time of high production and over a long period of time," while at Sydney "this company is trying to do it in a hurry at a time of low production."¹⁷ Another significant difference that was not mentioned was DOSCO's decision to intensify its exploitation of labour through a reduction and disciplining of its workforce without introducing newer and more efficient technology as had been done in central Canada.

The assurances from union officials did not lessen the frustration and anger felt by many Sydney steel workers. This was especially true for those who were already

¹⁴ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, October 18, 1961.

¹⁵ Post-Record (Sydney), October 21, 1961.

¹⁶ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, October 18, 1961.

¹⁷ Ibid.

laid off, half of whom were about to have their unemployment insurance benefits expire.¹⁸ The situation for these workers took on an air of desperation. With acute housing shortages for unemployed steel workers, some of whom were threatened with eviction, the Unemployed Workers Union became active and through the Cape Breton Labour Council offered bread at reduced prices to the unemployed of the city which had reached 23.5% of the employable workforce.¹⁹ It was reported by the Unemployed Union that many of the children of the unemployed were not getting enough to eat.²⁰ The union leadership's response to the unemployment problem was to plan a local conference on unemployment in conjunction with various community groups and make recommendations to all levels of government.²¹

The company further angered the workers by laying off men for a few days and then recalling them, thus preventing them from using their vacation credits.²² In the face of mounting frustration, local USWA staff representative Ben O'Neil stated that the union must resist the company's measures, but he cautioned that it must be done in "a rational manner." However, oppositionists called for a tougher response despite the company's threats of plant closure which were thinly veiled.²³ They

¹⁸ Post-Record (Sydney), October 28, 1961.

¹⁹ Post-Record (Sydney), October 30, 1961, January 29, 31, 1962.

²⁰ Post-Record (Sydney), March 14, 1962.

²¹ Dosco National Committee, Proceedings, December 14, 1961, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

²² USWA Local 1064 Minutes, October 18, 1961.

²³ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, October 24, 1961.

criticized staff representatives and the national leadership for their handling of the situation. Jim Ryan, one of the most vocal oppositionists, stated that the local membership was caught unaware by the developing crisis, because it was not alerted "by high labour officials who were well versed in the matter."²⁴

The union representatives filed workers' grievances against the company based on provisions in the contract, but no other action was recommended by them as a way of forcing a withdrawal of the "experts". After pursuing this course of action, the president of local 1064 finally announced to the membership that there was no provision in the contract which prevented the company from changing schedules and combining jobs. But, oppositionists insisted that "a schedule is a schedule" regardless of the opinion of national office representatives, and that it should not be changed except through negotiations.²⁵

After consultations with the Premier of Nova Scotia and the Prime Minister of Canada, local union officials told the steel workers that, "unless this company was made to diversify there will be no work available on [the] steel plant, period." Union leaders argued that the union must begin to pressure the provincial and federal levels of the government to insure that the plant is diversified.²⁶ By focusing on government, the union leadership down-played the importance of workplace actions and urged the workers to change their strategy from one which confronted the

²⁴ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, October 31, 1961.

²⁵ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, November 7, 14, 1961

²⁶ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, December 5, 1961.

company to one which tried to enlist government assistance in restoring the industry to health. This strategy was resisted by oppositionists who insisted on workplace action.

The workers' determination to resist the company's efficiency plans became evident when DOSCO reintroduced the "expert schedulers" in early 1962. This prompted 150 workers at the bar mill to strike in protest and refuse to resume work, despite requests from local union officials to do so.²⁷ The refusal to end the strike was based on the local leadership's inability to have the company agree to withdraw the Proudfoot consultants. The alternative to strike action was a clearly ineffective grievance procedure based on the contract.²⁸ When another 750 employees in the open hearth, blast furnace and electrical repair departments "quit work", the local union president again urged the workers to return to work "in accordance with Constitution of the Union, the agreement and Labour Relations Act." He insisted that DOSCO had every right to use the Proudfoot consultants and that it was now impossible to get rid of them.²⁹

This accommodationist position was reinforced by the local USWA staff representative who warned that the company had threatened to shut down the plant if the strike continued. The District Director also reminded the steel workers that the

²⁷ Post-Record (Sydney), January 23, 1962.

²⁸ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, January 23, 1962.

²⁹ Post-Record (Sydney), January 24, 1962.

union "is not running the plant."³⁰ Some oppositionists were upset enough that they contacted the Canadian Director to voice criticism of the local leadership, including some of the departmental stewards or "committee men". The local 1064 president replied that the union had shown its "distaste" for the "Proudfoots" and he defended the grievance committees as the "backbone of the union."³¹ The committees consisted of six members and functioned in each of the 16 departments at the plant. These committees were a training ground for future executive members, but included oppositionists. The criticism of local union representatives had the effect of pressuring the local president again "to protest" the presence of the Alexander Proudfoot people and demand that they be removed. However, he and most other USWA leaders had already resigned themselves to their presence.³²

The return to work still left the problem unresolved. Less than two months later, workers at the rod and bar mills once again struck over the rescheduling of workers which had resulted in the mills' workforce being reduced.³³ DOSCO management had previously warned union officials that if there was any work stoppage over implementation of the new schedule the mill would be closed "until the men came to their senses." Therefore, local union officials once again asked the men to return to work. But the general feeling among the workers was that they "must

³⁰ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, January 23, 1962.

³¹ Merner to Cotterill, February 8, 1962, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

³² Merner to Fairley, February 19, 1962, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

³³ Post-Record (Sydney), March 13, 1962

show the company we have reached the limit of our endurance."³⁴ That a bigger confrontation was developing was clear from the front page headlines of Sydney's Post-Record which read, "Plant Wide Tie-Up over Efficiency Experts a Possibility Today". As expected the strike spread from one department to another until it engulfed the Blast Furnace Department, the Wire and Nail Mill and the Mechanical Department. The union leadership's renewed appeals to return to work were ignored and numerous shouts of "tie her up" and "we have taken enough" were heard at union meetings. The men insisted that the workload was too heavy given the reductions in the workforce.³⁵

The walk-outs virtually stopped production throughout the plant, and the company warned that it would have to bank the furnaces if the workers did not return within a day. The Labour Gazette reported that 673 workers struck in the period from March 15 to March 19.³⁶ While some departments were struck for 24 hours or less, the Rod and Bar Mill "voted" to return to work after four days on strike and only then on the condition that the company agree to set up a departmental committee of two supervisors and two "catchers" to investigate their complaints.³⁷ The fact that two of the "catchers" or production workers and not two union representatives were

³⁴ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, March 13, 1962.

³⁵ Post-Record (Sydney), March 14, 1962.

³⁶ Labour Gazette, Vol 62, 1962, p. 581. However, the strike actually involved more workers than was reported by the Department of Labour since its statistics only included strikes which were reported to have lasted at least 24 hours.

³⁷ Post-Record (Sydney), March 20, 1962.

to sit on the committee suggests a lack of trust and confidence in the union representatives.

The extent of intra-union conflict was minimized by the union leadership in their public statements. The District Director claimed in a televised interview that the union had received "excellent cooperation" from the departmental committees, but that the turmoil was the result of the "irresponsible actions of a small element within the union" who were condemning union officers and the contract.³⁸ The conflict within the union was so intense that priests from the Roman Catholic parishes of the city intervened publicly to urge steel workers to support the union leadership:

to examine the motives and intentions of men who say that it is a matter of little concern to them that the course of action they urge leads to a break-down of the union. If there is reason to question the stand taken by your executive you are still committed by union principles to support them here and now.³⁹

The Post-Record also provided the union's leadership with further moral support by stating that: "For our money Jimmy Nicholson is one of the finest labour leaders in the east. He doesn't receive much publicity but his work is widely recognized in the top echelons of the United Steel Workers of America."⁴⁰

The attempt to isolate the oppositional leadership from the mass of steel workers by suggesting that the latter were being misled by a few "irresponsible" people brought rebukes from Jim Ryan, who made no apologies for his or the

³⁸ Post-Record (Sydney), March 15, 17, 1962

³⁹ Post-Record (Sydney), March 19, 1962.

⁴⁰ Post-Record (Sydney), October 28, 1961

delegate to a future policy conference.⁸⁰

Oppositionists were again to propose in 1964 that the influence of staff representatives at conferences be restricted by having them identify what local they represented, since they were using the credentials of locals which did not send delegates.⁸¹ It was later noted that these staff representatives invariably voted in support of leadership positions on various issues and wielded considerable power, since they or an, delegate could cast up to ten votes.⁸² It is perhaps revealing of the union's functioning that there was never a list of the participating staff included in the policy conferences' records, despite the fact that they apparently participated in the conferences and greatly influenced their policies.

Other oppositional resolutions called for a full-time organizing committee, a return to the "unified" bargaining strategy of 1946, and organizing the unorganized instead of raiding other unions. All of these were rejected outright as unconstitutional, or replaced with much weaker resolutions, or defeated with the support of loyal union delegates. Even the demand for more militant action and a greater commitment to the use of the strike weapon was discouraged by the national leadership.⁸³

As an alternative to the militant policies proposed by local opposition, the

⁸⁰ USWA National Policy Conference, Hamilton, April 27-9, 1961, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁸¹ USWA National Policy Conference, Montreal, April 16-18, 1964, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁸² Mahoney to National Office Staff, August 6, 1966, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁸³ USWA National Policy Conference, Vancouver, April 5-6, 1962, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

strikers' action. He insisted that the action should have been taken sooner, and he charged that there was "a lack of leadership by [the] union from top to bottom"⁴¹ At a local union meeting, the District Director was forced to defend his anti-strike statements and actions. He insisted that he had been following a procedure for handling grievances that "should be followed in all cases settling disputes." Once again, he warned the membership against "some few irresponsible parties who were urging the men to take action detrimental to their best interests."⁴²

The steel workers returned to work, and the "experts" continued their evaluations of the DOSCO operation, but in the end the company did not entirely succeed in its attempts to impose a more rigid discipline on the Sydney steel workers. While the most extensive strike action occurred in March 1962, at least forty-six stoppages occurred in various plant departments between 1961 and 1964.⁴³ Disciplinary action was regularly taken by the company during and after this period and included warnings, suspensions and dismissals. The records are incomplete, but the available ones show that dozens of warnings, suspensions and discharges were administered by the company in 1965 and 1966.⁴⁴ The resistance by the workers was apparently effective enough that the head of DOSCO's Industrial Relations

⁴¹ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, March 19, 1962.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Dosco Industrial Relations Department Reports, MG 14, 26, Box 13, File 2, Beaton Institute.

⁴⁴ Dosco Industrial Relations Department Reports, MG 14, 26, File 3, 4, 5, Box 13, Beaton Institute.

Department complained to other DOSCO management personnel that he did not agree "with the practice of rehiring discharged employees" since it "reduces the effectiveness of discipline."⁴⁵

According to then rank-and-file activist Winston Ruck, the company was soon convinced of the necessity and benefit of consulting with workers about production problems and the changes that would affect them.⁴⁶ However, workers continued to protest disciplinary measures and working conditions through the grievance procedure and absenteeism.⁴⁷ As for absenteeism, in the first half of 1966, 326 workers were absent without leave and 1,469 workers reported off sick. The company calculated the absenteeism rate at 3.7%, excluding overtime, which was reported to have necessitated 1,267 hours of overtime.⁴⁸

The "spontaneous" strike activity of the early 1960's was the first of its type at Sydney since the 1940's. It was important because the rank and file, led by militant oppositionists, openly and repeatedly defied both the local and national union leadership. It was also significant that the workers struck in violation of the contract showing that they challenged management's right to organize and direct production. In

⁴⁵ Dosco Industrial Relations Department Reports, E. F. Alderton to E. Buist, December 10, 1964, MG 14, 26, Box 13, File 2, Beaton Institute.

⁴⁶ Interview with Winston Ruck, Sydney Steel Project - Skills Adjustment Study, Beaton Institute, 1990.

⁴⁷ Industrial Relations Department Reports, MG 14, 26, File 3, 4, 5, Box 13, Beaton institute.

⁴⁸ Dosco Industrial Relations Department Reports, MG 14, 26, File 4, Box 13, Beaton Institute.

addition, the strike activity suggested a level of support for oppositional leaders that they had not enjoyed in a decade and a half. Finally, as one steel worker noted, the unemployment resulting from the work force reductions and the struggle against the Proudfoots led to a politicization of many workers who later continued their activism throughout the 1960's and 1970's.⁴⁹

C) An Oppositionist Amongst the Establishment Leadership

The crisis precipitated by the introduction of the efficiency experts and the union leadership's inability to deal with it resulted in the 1962 election of opposition leader Jim Ryan as local 1064 president.⁵⁰ This marked the first time that a majority of incumbent executive members were defeated. Only three of the seven incumbents retained executive positions. However, the new executive members were not all oppositionists and were certainly not united around a common strategy or program.⁵¹

Although the revolt by Sydney steel workers did not lead to a complete electoral victory by the oppositional forces, it greatly disturbed the national union officials, who feared that it might lead to the electoral defeat of the incumbent District Director. The District Director had made things worse by taking some vacation time after an USWA international board meeting in Miami while the Sydney local was in turmoil. This infuriated the Canadian Director, who told him that "that kind of

⁴⁹ Dan Yakimchuk, Interview, April 15, 1993.

⁵⁰ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, June 26, 1962.

⁵¹ Don MacPherson, Interview, April 14, 1993.

irresponsibility seems to me absolutely incredible."⁵² An electoral defeat was considered a possibility, since the Sydney local formed the base of the union's newly established District 2, which covered the Atlantic region.⁵³ The Canadian Director reminded the District Director that both of them had assured President MacDonald that the District Director could easily manage such a small district, "where one local union could control the election of the Director." An election under such circumstances might "result in some more irresponsible person being elected" District Director and occupying his place on the union's international board.⁵⁴

Such an electoral upset was avoided, but the impact of the entire episode was felt by the national leadership when Sydney steel workers introduced a resolution at the policy conference that attacked the introduction of the efficiency experts and the leadership's response to these measures. It stated that with the implementation of the Proudfoot schedule, three jobs were sometimes collapsed into one, but that a clause in the contract actually forbade the company taking such measures. This, the resolution stated, pointed to "the serious lack of strong leadership provided the local by the staff members of the national and international offices" and resolved that serious attention be given the problem. In typical USWA fashion, the motion was referred to District Director Nicholson, one of the principal people at whom the criticism was directed,

⁵² Mahoney to Nicholson, March 4, 1963, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁵³ Quebec now formed District 5 and had its own Regional Director. I.W. Abel to All Local Secretaries in Canada, May 26, 1961, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁵⁴ Mahoney to Nicholson, March 4, 1963, MG 28 I 268, NAC. The District Director was not challenged in the election. See Labour Gazette, Vol. 62, 1962, p. 415.

rather than being voted on or seriously investigated by the union."

The Canadian Director's 1961 report to the conference noted that the differential between Algoma-STELCO and DOSCO had "grown into a wide gap." He also referred to the general decline in the eastern steel industry and stated that the situation required "a great deal more willingness by the company to cooperate with the various levels of government" and "a much more imaginative lead by the governments of Canada and of Nova Scotia."⁵⁶ The District Director's report to the conference expressed the hope "that greater opportunities for employment will flow from the ideas and suggestions" put forth by the union.⁵⁷ In contrast to the national leaders' approach, under Ryan's leadership, Sydney steel workers used tough bargaining tactics, including the strike weapon. In the 1962 negotiations, the union sought a one-year contract, parity with STELCO workers, improved pensions, vacation credits, and protection against lay-offs.⁵⁸ To show their opposition to the use of an outside contractor, 300 steel workers struck for two days in the midst of negotiations.⁵⁹

In light of the recent difficulties at the plant, steel workers also demanded

⁵⁵ USWA National Policy Conference, Sault Ste Marie, June 13-5, 1963, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁵⁶ Labour Gazette, Vol. 62, 1962, p. 415.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Post-Record (Sydney), August 24, 1962.

⁵⁹ Labour Gazette, Vol. 62, 1962, p. 1230; Cape Breton Post (Sydney), August 25, 27, 1962.

"restrictions on the company written into the contract." These were designed to prevent DOSCO from arbitrarily changing established work rules and schedules without negotiating such changes. However, the bargaining proved difficult as negotiations dragged on for months.⁶⁰ DOSCO was determined to limit concessions to the workers and offered a three-year contract, which the leadership finally recommended to the membership. However, it was overwhelmingly rejected by the steel workers because of the length of the contract, as well as the proposed new pension scheme.⁶¹

The executive, including president Ryan, claimed that there were misunderstandings among the membership about the proposed contract, especially the pension plan. After attempts to clarify the pension plan, the executive put the proposed contract to another vote, but once again, it was rejected by a significant majority of the workers. The executive then organized discussion meetings among the membership about the implications of the proposed new pension plan. A special effort was made to convince the members of the departmental union committees of the benefits of the package. The Canadian Director was also brought in to speak in support of the proposal.⁶² Finally, after some minor revisions in the proposal based

⁶⁰ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, December 4, 1962.

⁶¹ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, March 26, 1963; Chronicle Herald (Halifax), March 8, 1963, Beaton Institute, Labour and Union Clippings; Ben O'Neil to Eamon Park, January 31, 1963, MG 28 I 268, NAC; Eamon Park to Dosco National Committee, February 1, 1963, MG 28 I 268, NAC; Nicholson to Park, February 5, 1963, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁶² USWA Local 1064 Minutes, February 5, March 12, March 26, April 16, May 28, 1963.

on discussions with workers and further negotiations with management, another vote was called on the contract. However, to the utter dismay of the union leadership it was again rejected, but this time by only a slight majority.⁶³

Finally, the union leadership decided to have a vote on the contract with the welfare and pension provisions deleted, which resulted in the contract finally being ratified.⁶⁴ It took almost another six months before the pension provisions were accepted by the membership, although less than 10% of the local turned out to vote on it.⁶⁵ This opposition reflected the importance that the pension issue had acquired in an older work force that was faced with a declining industry.⁶⁶

The failure of the local 1064 leadership, including its oppositionist President, to negotiate a contract to the satisfaction of the membership was due in large part to the tough stand taken by the company in light of its increasingly weak competitive position. Clearly, one militant union president could not make a large difference. This was especially so because he did not have the support of some other members of the local 1064 executive and certainly did not have the full cooperation of the USWA staff and national leadership. Ryan was viewed by them as a renegade and a "red",

⁶³ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, June 14, 1963.

⁶⁴ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, June 25, July 23, 1963.

⁶⁵ Park to Dosco National Committee, March 17, 1964, Dosco National Committee Correspondence 1957-1969, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁶⁶ Two years later, many Sydney and Trenton steel workers still remained very agitated about the pension issue and communicated their anger and frustration to the national negotiating committee and the USWA leadership. See Donald Murphy to Nicholson, February 8, 1966, MG 28 I 268, NAC; Don Steele to Eamon Park, May 13, 1966, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

and red-baiting attacks by members of the union against him were implicitly accepted, if not publicly encouraged by the national leadership.⁶⁷ One rank and file critic of the opposition, who accused Ryan of being a communist, was considered by the Canadian Director and the staff representative in Sydney to be "a type who might be quite useful in the local union".⁶⁸

Although Ryan was unsuccessful in negotiating many sought-after contract provisions, he was credited by some with obtaining better seniority rights for workers. Apparently, the 1959 contract had allowed the company to ignore plant-wide seniority and lay off workers on the basis of job classification. The 1962 contract, at the urging of Ryan and many of the members, eliminated this stipulation and restored a form of bargaining-wide seniority. According to some activists, Ryan's leadership was most responsible for this important victory.⁶⁹ Given the divisions within the local executive and the relations between the local president and the national leadership, any consensus on strike action would have been difficult to achieve. Although Ryan sat on the executive with accommodationist union leaders, he did not accommodate entirely to them. He regularly challenged them to take a more militant and less compromising stance with the corporation.⁷⁰ This contradicts Michels' view

⁶⁷ Roy Flood to Mahoney, March 21, 1963, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁶⁸ Mahoney to O'Neil, March 26, 1963; O'Neil to Mahoney, April 4, 1963, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁶⁹ Interview with Don MacPherson, Sydney Steel - Skills Adjustment Study, June 20, 1990, Beaton Institute; Interview with Winston Ruck, Sydney Steel - Skills Adjustment Study, 1990, Beaton Institute.

⁷⁰ Don MacPherson, Interview, April 14, 1993.

that such opposition leaders were integrated into the oligarchy and enticed to play the same role as their predecessors.

D) Local Intervention at the National Level

During the early 1960's, when oppositionists were again influential in the union, they and their supporters were able to have progressive resolutions passed at the local union level and forwarded to the union's national conferences. For instance, during Ryan's tenure as local 1064 president, a number of resolutions to the national wage and policy conference clearly challenged the national leadership. One of them

"Resolved that this policy conference call for an end to the raiding of one union by another, a cannibalistic practice directly responsible for the waste of millions of dollars of the dues money of the rank and file, which serves only to bring the labour movement into a state of disunity and public disrepute."

The motion, which referred to the raiding of the Mine-Mill union by the USWA, was set aside because it was argued that one strong union was needed in the steel and metal producing industries and because the USWA was said to be fulfilling its democratic obligations by providing Mine-Mill members with a choice. The resolution also complemented one from STELCO's local 1005 which criticized the lack of effort in organizing the unorganized, in particular the Dofasco workers at Hamilton, a long standing point of contention for STELCO workers. Instead of having a vote on the resolution, it was referred to the District Director.⁷¹

⁷¹ USWA National Policy Conference, Sault Ste Marie, June 13-5, 1963, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

Another local 1064 resolution, calling for more Canadian autonomy, was also rejected by the majority of national conference participants. It was argued by the national leadership that there was already enough autonomy to deal with Canadian problems, and that an international union was needed to fight "internationally financed corporations." That the Canadian steel industry was not owned and controlled by American capital was apparently overlooked by conference participants. The local also submitted another resolution calling for a more detailed accounting of the salaries and expenses paid to union officers, and requesting that this information be made available to the general membership. But this also met with "non-concurrence". A third local 1064 resolution was called out of order when it proposed "that this conference go on record as being opposed to any increase in dues." It was argued by the national leadership that since dues increases were the domain of the international convention, such a resolution could not even be voted on by the national conference participants.⁷²

The opposition within local 1064 paralleled that in some other USWA locals, although there is no evidence that there was regular communication or coordination among them. The national leadership was faced with an increasingly disgruntled membership and more organized opposition groups within specific locals.⁷³ Part of the dissatisfaction revolved around the question of union democracy, an issue which

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ In his account of political developments within local 1005, Freeman argues that the local right-wing forces were placed more on the defensive after the failed 1958 Stelco strike. See Bill Freeman, 1982, op. cit., pp. 79-81.

the leadership was forced to address as union elections were called to fill national and international positions. The demand for greater democracy was linked to the growing demand among the membership for greater autonomy for the union's Canadian section. In the face of this challenge, the union leadership attempted to convince the members of their commitment to democracy and reform, while simultaneously attempting to undermine the credibility of the opposition. At the 1961 national policy conference in Hamilton, where the pro-autonomy forces were strongest, international secretary-treasurer I W. Abel warned the delegates that the USWA must be on guard against those who would wish to cause friction between Canada and the United States.⁷⁴

Reform-minded practice on the part of the leadership played a very subordinate role to the practice of union boosterism and defensiveness, which were designed to convey to the membership the idea that everything was just fine within the union. For example, after surveying the more than 300 participants at the 1960 national policy conference about the level of satisfaction they felt about the conference, Steel Labour declared that the results were "one more demonstration that the leadership of the United Steel Workers is in the hands of people who really want to make union democracy work."⁷⁵ Union officials also fiercely defended the union against those who were perceived as trying to "destroy" it with their criticisms. In

⁷⁴ USWA National Policy Conference, Hamilton, April 27-29, 1961, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁷⁵ Steel Labour, Vol. XXV, June, 1960, p. 2.

one impassioned speech, District 6 Director Larry Sefton stated that the USWA was "the most progressive and most democratic organization on the North American continent and we have proved it."⁷⁶

Such uncritical and defensive efforts by the leadership were complemented by appeals for loyalty to the union, in which the leaders suggested that loyalty to the union and to union principles was synonymous with loyalty to the leadership. For example, Canadian Director Mahoney waxed eloquent on "Democratic Rights and Union Responsibilities" and in particular the importance of "honest, hardworking leaders at every level, together with a loyal, cooperative membership."⁷⁷ It is interesting that democracy was never acknowledged to include the right of the members to dissent against union leaders and union policy, perhaps except for the casting of a ballot in union elections.

The occasional acknowledgement by the national union leadership of the need for union revitalization was not followed by any concrete changes that were called for by the opposition. Neither did it silence the oppositionists within the locals. Despite the defeat of communists as an organized force within the union, a new generation of oppositionists was filling the vacuum and beginning to be elected to local executives

⁷⁶ Steel Labour, Vol. XXV, October, 1960, p. 1.

⁷⁷ Steel Labour, Vol. XXV, November, 1960, pp. 2, 5.

and appear at national conferences to defend their proposed policies.⁷⁸ For instance, a new left-wing executive was elected at Hamilton's Local 1005 in 1962, coinciding with the opposition's success in having Jim Ryan elected at Sydney. The change at STELCO was more radical since the whole executive was replaced by a new "slate" of reformers.⁷⁹

At the 1961 National Policy Conference, resolutions calling for area councils, larger strike funds, and greater representation at national conferences, were unsuccessfully promoted by oppositionists. Their mistrust of the union's national leadership and their determination to democratize the union were evident in one resolution submitted by Local 4906 of St. Thomas, Ontario. It harshly criticized the union's directors, and staff representatives who were hired by them, and unsuccessfully called for restrictions on the participation of the latter in formulating union policy:

Whereas: The established policy of the district directors in Canada is to pack the policy Conference with their own staffmen and whereas these staffmen invariably follow the dictates of their respective directors rather than the needs and desires of the rank and file. Therefore be it resolved that ...no staffmen (sic) shall serve as a

⁷⁸ The decline of Communist Party influence in Cape Breton was clearly demonstrated when Tim Buck visited Sydney in 1961 on his 70th birthday celebration tour. His supporters could not even rent a hall for him to speak in and labour leaders avoided him, according to the Post-Record. There were reported to be only about 50 active members of the Party left in Cape Breton. See Post-Record (Sydney), March 4, 1961.

⁷⁹ Bill Freeman, 1982, op. cit., p. 91.

delegate to a future policy conference.⁸⁰

Oppositionists were again to propose in 1964 that the influence of staff representatives at conferences be restricted by having them identify what local they represented, since they were using the credentials of locals which did not send delegates.⁸¹ It was later noted that these staff representatives invariably voted in support of leadership positions on various issues and wielded considerable power, since they or an, delegate could cast up to ten votes.⁸² It is perhaps revealing of the union's functioning that there was never a list of the participating staff included in the policy conferences' records, despite the fact that they apparently participated in the conferences and greatly influenced their policies.

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As an alternative to the militant policies proposed by local opposition, the

⁸⁰ USWA National Policy Conference, Hamilton, April 27-9, 1961, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁸¹ USWA National Policy Conference, Montreal, April 16-18, 1964, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁸² Mahoney to National Office Staff, August 6, 1966, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁸³ USWA National Policy Conference, Vancouver, April 5-6, 1962, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

Canadian Director advocated that the union channel more of its energies and resources into political action. The rationalization for this approach was that:

Until the political rules of the game are changed, the cards appear to be stacked against successful striking. We must renew our efforts and give a great deal more thought to our search for alternative measures.⁸⁴

Mahoney decried the lack of cooperation from government and employers in Canada, and lamented the fact that the union had suggested cooperation with the steel companies on 23 occasions between 1941 and 1960 but that these appeals had met with little response.⁸⁵ Instead of concluding that more militancy was necessary in order to achieve results, such government bashing was used to garner support within the union for a more labour friendly government. The central element of this political approach, of course, was support for the newly formed New Democratic Party (NDP), which the Canadian Director claimed served the interests of the whole community rather than a particular class.⁸⁶

The accommodationist position of the national leadership coincided with that of the USWA leadership in Pittsburgh. At the 1964 Canadian Policy Conference, International Vice-President Howard R. Hague spoke of the accomplishments of the recently formed Human Relations Committee, which he claimed "had solved a great number of our problems," which might otherwise possibly have led to a "work

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ USWA National Policy Conference, Sault Ste Marie, June 13-5, 1963, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁸⁶ USWA National Policy Conference, Vancouver, April 5-6, 1962, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

stoppage in this vital industry."⁸⁷ One result of such a strategy, which was not mentioned by Hague, was that the USWA in the United States had just signed a two-year agreement with no wage increases.⁸⁸ Only Secretary-Treasurer I.W. Abel, who would soon contest MacDonald for the Presidency, addressed the conference delegates in more reform-minded terms about the need for the union movement to look within itself and regain labour's lost strength. However, Abel's approach was an attempt to distance himself from the increasingly unpopular international president, as well as to appease militants in the various locals who were forwarding policies aimed at making the union more responsive and accountable to the membership. The conservative and authoritarian style of International President MacDonald was enough of an embarrassment to many international officers and staff of the union, including those in the Canadian section, that they finally encouraged and supported Abel's bid for the Presidency when it became clear that MacDonald could not be discouraged from seeking the office once again.⁸⁹

The national and international leadership's opposition to MacDonald and support for Abel, did not include support for many of the policy changes for which the opposition had been calling. Even after Abel's election to the presidency, the

⁸⁷ USWA National Policy Conference, Montreal, April 16-18, 1964, MG 28 I 268, NAC. At least one representative from Pittsburgh was always present at the conferences. President MacDonald was always invited to attend, but on this occasion he sent a taped address that was played to the delegates. Such actions were in keeping with his pretentious and boastful style.

⁸⁸ Labour Gazette, vol 62, 1962, pp. 499-500.

⁸⁹ Mahoney to Directors and Staff in Canada, November 6, 1964, MG 28 I 268, NAC; Mahoney to All Locals in Canada, November 11, 1964, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

same practices and policies persisted. At the 1967 constitutional convention, the election for officers at the local level was changed from every two years to every three years, further limiting the opportunity for leadership renewal. In addition, there were still restrictions on who might serve in these positions. President Abel reminded all locals and staff that Article III of the Constitution denied the right to hold union office to any member who was a "member, consistent supporter, or who actively participates in the activities of the Communist Party... or other subversive organization which opposes the democratic principles to which the United States and Canada and our Union is (sic) dedicated".⁹⁰

Local union autonomy was also limited by ad hoc decisions of the leadership rather than as a direct result of union policy. Initiatives at the local level were often monitored and sometimes looked upon with suspicion if they allowed for the expression of independent ideas that contradicted those of the established leadership. Sometime , these ideas and activities were discouraged by the international leadership. For example, the international executive moved to restrict the more than 100 union local publications by providing "suitable direction" for them. This included ensuring that they were not used for intra-union politicking.⁹¹ The international executive board also firmly rejected any serious criticism of United States foreign policy, including that related to the Vietnam War. According to President Abel, the USWA

⁹⁰ I.W. Abel to all District Directors, Staff and Local Unions, April 14, 1967, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁹¹ Walter J. Burke to all District Directors, July 29, 1966, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

supported "wholeheartedly the program and policies of President Johnson with respect to Vietnam" and he harshly criticized anti-war protestors on behalf of the union.⁹²

The new international president also continued to oppose greater autonomy for the Canadian section of the union, which now was being advocated by oppositionists, especially within local 1005 at STELCO.⁹³ The autonomy movement was of ongoing and special importance to the international leadership, since Canadian membership had increased dramatically from 70,000 members in 398 locals in 1957 to 109,000 members in 535 locals by 1965.⁹⁴ One of the demands of the pro-autonomy forces was that locals should have the final say over whether to strike, rather than final approval coming from the international representative. Oppositionists within local 1005 also attacked the decision-making process of the policy conferences by forwarding a resolution which called for all resolutions submitted by local unions to be "either accepted or rejected by the majority of delegates assembled by vote, if so requested, and not by a resolutions Committee." Not surprisingly, the resolution met with non-concurrence from the very committee it opposed and was subsequently defeated by a vote of the delegates.⁹⁵

The opposition fared no better when advocating changes related to collective

⁹² I.W. Abel to Jean Breteau (of the Federation of Steel workers in France), September 6, 1966, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁹³ USWA National Policy Conference, Toronto, May 13-5, 1965, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁹⁴ Labour Gazette, Vol. 65, 1965, p. 492.

⁹⁵ USWA National Policy Conference, Toronto, May 13-5, 1965, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

bargaining strategies. A resolution from local 1005 to the 1966 national policy conference called for the contracts of the "big three" to expire on the same date, but this was referred to the basic steel committee for consideration, and no apparent action was taken on the issue. The disparities between the wages of Nova Scotia and Ontario Steel workers were very marked by this time. The STELCO and Algoma hourly labour rates were \$2.21 1/2 while DOSCO's was only \$2.06. The CWS increment for the former was six and one-half cents and DOSCO's was only six cents.⁹⁶

The DOSCO National Committee, which was established to coordinate the negotiations of DOSCO subsidiaries, also seemed to achieve few results. It mainly focused on pensions and insurance schemes while ignoring or passively pursuing common base rates and coordinated strike action.⁹⁷ Even coordination of the pensions presented difficulties, and so Eamon Park, the Toronto head-office representative on the committee, recommended that the negotiating committee be given "a certain amount of flexibility."⁹⁸ Almost ten years after its formation, the committee was still discussing the need for common pension plans and common dates for the expiration of contracts, but apparently no specific strategy was formulated to

⁹⁶ USWA National Policy Conference, Winnipeg, April 21-2, 1966, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁹⁷ Dosco National Committee, Proceedings, March 4-5, May 15, 1965, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁹⁸ Dosco National Committee, Minutes, September 21, 1965, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

accomplish these goals.⁹⁹ The DOSCO committee appeared to function more as a forum for the exchange of information between the participating locals than as a forum for devising broad based strategy and coordinating actions by the locals. Coordinated strike action was never seriously considered by the national leadership.¹⁰⁰ For example, when the workers at DOSCO's Montreal operation struck in 1966, the local union leadership at a DOSCO plant in the Toronto area voiced dissatisfaction at the "complete lack of real information and communication between us here in Toronto and our brothers in other plants of DOSCO."¹⁰¹

The coordinated negotiations within the DOSCO committee enhanced neither the potential for coordinated strike action among locals nor strike action by individual locals. When a national meeting of DOSCO locals was held to discuss the DOSCO strike in the Toronto area, it was suggested by a local delegate that DOSCO be informed that all its plants would be struck in 30 days if no settlement was reached. The proposal was opposed by Eamon Park and dropped in favour of a press release and a request for donations from steel locals.¹⁰² When the DOSCO plant at Etobicoke, Ontario was struck because of unresolved grievances by the workers, the National Director immediately advised the local to return to work since it might

⁹⁹ Dosco National Committee, Minutes, February 23, 1967, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹⁰⁰ Dosco National Committee, Minutes, January 20, 1967, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹⁰¹ William Hans to Eamon Park, November 25, 1966, MG 28 I 268, NAC; Park to Hans, December 13, 1966, MG 28 I 268, NAC; Hans to Park, January 15, 1967, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹⁰² Sefton to Gilmour, January 30, 1967, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

jeopardize the negotiations at other DOSCO plants. He also called their attention to Article 6 of the contract which forbade stoppages under pain of discipline or dismissal.¹⁰³

E) The Return to an Establishment-Dominated Executive

One result of the largely unsuccessful 1963 contract negotiations was that the local 1064 president and some other members of the executive were replaced by a new executive led by ex-president Martin Merner. However, the defeat of the oppositional president and the return to an establishment dominated one did not represent a total defeat for the oppositional forces. The new executive included several members who continued to provide opposition to the conservative policies and practices advocated by the local president and the national leadership.¹⁰⁴

The oppositionists and their supporters within the general membership successfully pushed the local to pass progressive and contentious resolutions that were forwarded to national policy conferences. For instance, at the 1966 conference, local 1064 put forward a motion calling for an end to the raiding of other unions which worked against labour's interests, a fact that "should be evident to all except the stupid and irresponsible." Nonetheless, the resolutions committee basically ignored it by putting forward a pro-raiding resolution from another local, which called for one union in the steel-making and smelting industry and inviting Mine-Mill members to

¹⁰³ Mahoney to Albert Sheppard, August 5, 1965, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹⁰⁴ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, June 30, 1964.

join the USWA.¹⁰⁵ As in the past, opposition resolutions continued to be passed with difficulty at the local level, only to be rejected at the national conferences.

The establishment-dominated executive conservatively interpreted the contract as they had in the past. This was demonstrated in December 1965 when 1,200 workers walked off the job over the lay-off of 95 workers, while two junior employees filled the positions of foremen. The local union President initially supported the strikers' view that management was not abiding by the contract and stated that it has "antagonized the men on the plant to the extent that directions from the union executive is [sic] ignored by the membership." But, in the second day of the strike, the union leadership apparently agreed with management and urged the men to "honor our contract" and prevent any further damage to union members, their families, and the economy of the area.¹⁰⁶

DOSCO's management agreed to discuss the problem further following the resumption of work, but in a press statement it reminded the union that, according to the contract, its members "shall not engage or participate in or sanction any strike whatsoever, that there shall be no work stoppage and no limit on or curtailment of production of any employee's work." It further reminded the union leadership that the contract also gives the company the unrestricted right to make promotions.¹⁰⁷ The

¹⁰⁵ After almost two decades of raiding by the USWA, the members of most Mine-Mill locals in Canada finally voted to join the USWA. See Labour Gazette, Vol. 67, 1967, p. 622.

¹⁰⁶ Cape Breton Post (Sydney), December 11, 1965.

¹⁰⁷ Cape Breton Post (Sydney), December 11, 13, 1965.

unwillingness of much of the leadership to oppose these aspects of the contract, or even to question the ways in which they were being interpreted, remained a contentious issue for many steel workers and generated worker frustration and anger.

The 1965 contract was settled much more quickly than the 1962 contract. Apparently, the union's national leadership, through the DOSCO National Committee, had played a central role in the 1965 negotiations. Assistant Director Eamon Park had recommended to the president of Local 1064 that the local negotiate for a base rate of \$2.20, a point differential of 6.7 cents, and better vacations, insurance and pension plans.¹⁰⁸ The 28-month contract indeed resembled the Assistant Director's recommendation in that it included incremental increases that produced a base rate of \$2.19 at the end of the contract, as well as other benefits.¹⁰⁹ These modest gains reflected the pragmatic and conciliatory approach of the union leadership to negotiations. DOSCO's Superintendent of Industrial Relations later stated that negotiations had a "very cordial basis" in which the union initially pushed hard on wages, pensions and vacations, but later "gave up" on retirement benefits, vacations, holiday pay and supplementary unemployment benefits.¹¹⁰

The contract was ratified by a two-to-one margin, but over one-fourth of the union membership did not vote, suggesting that there was considerable apathy or

¹⁰⁸ Eamon Park to Members of the Dosco Committee, February 7, 1965, MG 28 I 268, NAC; Park to Merner, June 4, 1965, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹⁰⁹ R.J. Clifford to all Hourly-rated Employees, August 9, 1965, MG 14, 26, Beaton Institute.

¹¹⁰ Alex LeDrew to N.S. Scott, November 19, 1965, MG 14, 26 File 3, Box 13, Beaton institute.

cynicism among a significant number of steel workers.¹¹¹ Undoubtedly, the company's claim that it was facing real hardship, and the leadership's refusal to test the corporation's claim, played a role in the acceptance of the contract. STELCO negotiations took a very different path and produced a different result for local 1005 members. They settled for a three-year contract which gave them parity with United States steel workers, but it took a five-day walkout by workers during negotiations to achieve it.¹¹²

F) Conclusion

The early 1960's saw an intensification of intra-union struggles within local 1064 and the entire Canadian section of the USWA. These were a product of the deepening crisis of the Sydney industry and the relative lack of gains made by Canadian steel workers. In the case of Sydney steel, the dissatisfaction related to issues of control in the workplace and job security as well as monetary gains and benefits. The failures of the union were perceived by many workers as due to more than the conditions faced by the industry. Instead, union practices and policies, as upheld and implemented by the union leadership, were seen as impediments to defending steel workers' interests.

The opposition's increased strength in this period resulted in a more vigorous contestation of the established leadership and even a temporary takeover of the local

¹¹¹ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, October 5, 1965.

¹¹² Labour Gazette, Vol. 66, 1966, p. 644.

1064 presidency by an opposition leader. Not since the late 1930's and early 1940's had opposition leaders enjoyed such widespread influence among the rank and file. However, the opposition remained quite disorganized and diffuse. The limited electoral success of the opposition at Sydney could in part be attributed to its lack of organization and cohesiveness as a group. The Sydney situation paralleled that at STELCO somewhat, but the opposition at STELCO was even more successful and took the form of two organized factions, a left-wing faction and an autonomy faction. As in the case of local 1064, the national union leadership remained fiercely antagonistic to the local opposition.¹¹³

Despite its limited success, the opposition continued to play an extremely important role in placing checks on the established leadership and in advocating progressive policies within the union. However, its only success in establishing policy was at the local level since the resolutions forwarded to national conferences could easily be defeated by the national leadership, the staff representatives whom they controlled and the local delegates who were loyal to them. This differed from the situation in the UAW where members of the district-based left caucus seriously challenged the international leadership on national issues such as support for the CCF and its successor, the New Democratic Party.¹¹⁴ At Sydney, the leading oppositionists did not appear to openly challenge the USWA's affiliation with the NDP, but they insisted on the need to rely mainly on steel worker solidarity rather

¹¹³ Bill Freeman, 1982. *op. cit.*, pp. 173-176.

¹¹⁴ Charlotte Yates, 1993. *op. cit.*, pp. 136-139.

than a political party.

While the plight of the Sydney industry continued to provide a rationale for union failures and somewhat of a shield against criticism of the union leadership, the opposition continued to criticize an increasingly embattled local executive. These intra-union struggles can be understood as an indication of the growing crisis within the USWA's particular construction of "responsible unionism", and its inability to respond effectively to the detrimental effects of the employer's strategy of reducing costs and increasing efficiency at the expense of the steel workers.

The new wave of opposition during this period counters, to some extent, Michels' argument about the unrelenting tendency towards oligarchy within large bureaucratic organizations such as unions. Instead, it supports Gouldner's argument about the recurring and persistent efforts by union members to establish greater democracy and oppose oligarchy. Although the limited success of the opposition's efforts does not completely rebut Michels' argument about the endurance of oligarchical structures, it does challenge his suggestion that oligarchy is unconditional and absolute. In addition, Michels' view that all leaders become incorporated into the oligarchy, is not supported by Jim Ryan's actions as president. Ryan continued to oppose the union's established leaders and consequently was never trusted by them.

The increased oppositional activity also corresponds to Offe's fourth stage of union development when the reliance on state-sponsored institutions no longer provide the support needed to maintain the gains made earlier. In particular, the appeals to the state and the reliance on the industrial relations system failed the steel workers in the

sense of maintaining the few workplace rules and practices which had benefited the steel workers. However, the inability of union officials to deal with the failure by state-sponsored institutions and the resulting rank-and-file rebellion, such as occurred with the Sydney steel industry and the USWA, is not addressed by Offe. Neither is it taken into account by Mills' suggestion that union leaders, as "managers of discontent", are usually successful at playing the role of managing discontent.

Chapter IX

FROM COALITION-BUILDING TO VICTORY FOR THE OPPOSITION, 1966-72

A) Introduction

The early 1960's was a time of increased oppositional activity within local 1064 and the entire USWA. It persisted into the late 1960's after being temporarily arrested by the announced closure of the Sydney steel plant. This crisis precipitated the formation of a coalition of community forces, including the union. The coalition was designed to pressure the government to intervene in the industry. The threat to the industry undercut intra-union conflicts and forced oppositional as well as established leaders to focus on this immediate danger.

The building of a popular coalition and the mobilization of the community brought about state intervention which rescued the industry. The intervention was facilitated by a buoyant national economy and a continuing high demand for steel. It made possible an attempted modernization of the plant and the largest hiring of new young workers at Sydney in two decades. Once the industrial crisis had abated and the modernization of the plant was in progress, intra-union conflict resurfaced and intensified as the opposition pushed for more militant and aggressive action. Oppositionists also sought to win executive positions within the union local by using a more coordinated approach than in the past. Their victory brought to office the most progressive and militant local executive in 25 years and facilitated the first plant-wide strike in 25 years.

B) Coalition-Building as a Response to Industrial Crisis

Having only partially succeeded in imposing its job combination and workforce reduction plans on Sydney steel workers, DOSCO and its new parent company, Hawker Siddeley Ltd., considered making the labour force more productive through technological innovation. DOSCO President C. H. Drury publicly stated: "As the cost of labour rises, it becomes not only economically possible, but completely necessary, to substitute machinery for labour."¹ However, such a strategy was never pursued by DOSCO. Instead, most of DOSCO's investment in new plant equipment was directed toward its central Canadian operations, in particular the construction of a new rod and bar mill at Contrecoeur, Quebec.² Union representatives pointed out to the corporation's management that while construction of the mills at Contrecoeur, Quebec was progressing, DOSCO still had no plans for diversification or expansion at Sydney. In response to this situation, union representatives requested that the federal government form a commission to look into the effects of the Contrecoeur plant on the Sydney operation.³ "Diversify or die" became the slogan of the union.⁴

The correspondence between national union representatives and provincial politicians suggests that the union's national leadership wanted a complete separation

¹ C.H. Drury to Sydney Board of Trade, January 14, 1965, MG 14, 26, File 3, Box 13, Beaton Institute.

² Bishop, Joan, "Sydney Steel: Public Ownership and the Welfare State, 1967 to 1975", in The Island: New Perspectives on Cape Breton History: 1713-1990, Kenneth Donovan (ed.), Acadiensis Press, Fredericton: 1990, p.166.

³ Cape Breton Post (Sydney), December 23, 1965.

⁴ Cape Breton Post (Sydney), March 11, 1966.

of the issues of plant renewal and diversification at Sydney and the building of the new mills in Quebec. The leadership was at least as committed to seeing future steel producing facilities built by DOSCO in Quebec as it was in pressuring the company to expand its operations in Nova Scotia. Clearly, the national leadership was much more optimistic about the prospects of the Contrecoeur mills than about the future of the Sydney plant. The union's Director of Research notified both the National Director and the Premier of Nova Scotia that he anticipated "a possible progressive curtailment of operations at DOSCO's Sydney plant". He ended his letter by stating that, "I feel continued curtailment of steel operations at Sydney to be inevitable unless positive policies can be implemented to prevent its decline. The hour is five minutes to midnight."⁵

Maintaining the highest standards of "responsible unionism", the leadership assured the premier that the union wanted "positive results rather than publicity" and "to avoid as much as possible the experience we have had in the past in which announcements of layoffs have been dealt with as crisis situations."⁶ The Research Director suggested to National Director Mahoney that the union take the initiative in helping to find alternative employment for the anticipated displaced workers.⁷ He also suggested to the Premier that union, company, and government representatives meet under the auspices of the Voluntary Economic Planning Agency to develop

⁵ Waisglas to G.I. Smith, June 25, 1964. MG 28 I 268. NAC.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Waisglas to Mahoney, June 29, 1964. MG 28 I 268. NAC.

strategies for ensuring the survival of the Nova Scotia industry.⁸ Unfortunately, the cooperative approach taken by the union was not completely appreciated by government and business. A subcommittee of the Atlantic Development Board was later formed to address problems in the industry, but the USWA's participation was restricted.⁹

The national leadership's commitment to increasing DOSCO's steel producing capacity in Quebec was demonstrated when it provided the Premier with "confidential information" that DOSCO would soon announce its participation with the Quebec government in further developing the steel industry there. He stressed to the Premier that:

This should be kept confidential from the standpoint of the interest of the Steelworkers Union and the Province of Nova Scotia. Nothing should be done to prejudice Dosco's chances of participating in the establishing of rolling mill facilities with the Quebec government.¹⁰

That the local 1064 leadership knew of this correspondence is very unlikely. This is especially so since at this time, the oppositionist Jim Ryan was president of the local. The national leadership was undoubtedly withholding the information from steel workers at Sydney so as to contain the Sydney based opposition to the Quebec rolling mills. This was in keeping with the union leadership's preference for lobbying and consulting with government rather than educating and mobilizing the membership.

⁸ Waisglas to G.I. Smith, June 25, 1964, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

⁹ Waisglas to Nicholson, May 31, 1965, MG 28 I 268, NAC; Waisglas to J.R. Mills, May 31, 1965, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹⁰ Waisglas to G.I. Smith, June 25, 1964, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

It also indicates a distrust of the membership and a fear of their reaction to the situation.

DOSCO continued to erode the Sydney plant's industrial capacity. It reduced the Sydney plant's wire production through the removal of two wire-drawing machines and then responded evasively about management plans for the plant. Local union officials objected to Nova Scotia Premier Stanfield about the curtailing of the Sydney operation.¹¹ When DOSCO maintained its non-committal stance, the Sydney local passed a resolution demanding that the provincial and federal governments take action since there was now "grave uncertainty" in the industry.¹² These appeals to the government were ineffective, however, and DOSCO continued to cut costs by laying off 1,000 workers in the first six months of 1967.¹³

The local union leadership began to concentrate more of its energies on building community support for the purpose of pressuring the two levels of government to intervene decisively in assisting the industry, rather than on the traditional lobbying of government by union officials only. The local 1064 President appealed to all sectors of the community to support the union "and join in a fight to make sure positive action is taken by both governments." He and the Mayor of Sydney then led a delegation to Halifax and Ottawa to discuss the crisis with

¹¹ Cape Breton Post (Sydney), March 21, April 22, 1966; Chronicle Herald (Halifax), March 30, 1966.

¹² Cape Breton Post (Sydney), October 20, 1966.

¹³ Cape Breton Post (Sydney), June 12, 14, 1967.

provincial and federal politicians.¹⁴ The national office of the USWA sponsored a conference on the deepening crisis in the Nova Scotia steel industry as a means of focusing some attention on the problem. At that conference, the Canadian Research Director of the USWA expressed the view that DOSCO was not interested in the expansion of the Sydney facilities and that public ownership, or at least more public involvement, was needed in the industry. The local union leadership, with the support of the head office, organized the "Sydney Steel Committee" with the intention that it lead the fight with a proposal for government take-over.¹⁵

Some elements within the local union leadership considered making a request to government that Devco, the recently formed crown corporation that took control of the Cape Breton coal mines, be allowed to operate the Sydney steel industry. However, such a position was not embraced by all of the local executive officers, probably because they did not like the idea of being organizationally linked to the declining coal industry.¹⁶ In addition to these differences among the local leadership, there were other tensions among union officials. The research director was frustrated by the inaction of the staff representative at Sydney and the District Director who he claimed were reluctant to work closely with the New Democratic Party Member of Parliament for the area. They apparently feared the latter would quickly come to play

¹⁴ Cape Breton Post (Sydney), June 12, 14, 1967.

¹⁵ Don Steele to Gordon Milling, June 30, 1967, MG 28 I 268, NAC; Park to Mahoney, Nicholson, Milling and O'Neil, N.D., MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹⁶ Cape Breton Post, June 17, 23, 1967.

the leading role in the struggle and perhaps even start influencing union policy.¹⁷

This is somewhat surprising given the especially close relationship between the CCF/NDP and the leadership of the Canadian section of the USWA.

The differences within the union leadership about what strategy to pursue were made somewhat irrelevant when on Friday, October 13, 1967, DOSCO announced closure of the plant effective April 30, 1968. Blaming "high production costs and the not-competitive geographic location of the mill," the corporation reported losses of \$4.3 million in 1966 and \$6.4 million in the first six months of 1967.¹⁸ This took both the union and the various levels of government by surprise, since just prior to the announcement, DOSCO and its parent company, Hawker-Siddeley, had borrowed \$4 million from various government agencies and adopted a report which recommended some technological improvements to the plant.¹⁹ So devastating was this announcement that Friday, October 13 became widely known in the community as "Black Friday."

The unpreparedness of most union leaders for such an announcement is somewhat surprising, because there were, according to some, "clear warning signals to any informed observer of the Sydney steel plant that closure was imminent."²⁰ But

¹⁷ Milling to National Director's Secretary, July 9, 1967, MG 28 I 268, NAC; Milling to Merner and Steele, July 26, 1967, MG 28 I 268, NAC; Milling to Park, October 4, 1967, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

¹⁸ Cape Breton Post (Sydney), November 20, 1967.

¹⁹ Prime Minister Pearson and Nova Scotia Premier G.I. Smith were both reported to be angered by the closure. Cape Breton Post, October 14, 1967.

²⁰ Joan Bishop, 1990, op. cit., p. 167.

their reluctance to mobilize maximum worker and community support as a means of dealing with the crisis suggests how ill-prepared, unaccustomed, and unwilling the leadership was to doing anything beyond the normal collective bargaining and political lobbying practices. The weak response of the union leadership prompted criticism from some union members and a call for a special meeting of the full membership to plan a strategy to save the industry.²¹ But the union executive continued to take a much more conservative approach to the involvement of the rank and file. Local and national union representatives instead held a series of meetings with the provincial and federal governments and happily reported that the provincial government appeared ready to do almost anything to save the industry. The local president even paid high tribute to Conservative Premier "Ike" Smith and his Labour Minister McKeough.²² In addition, the union's national leadership requested of its 400 locals that they write to the federal government urging its intervention in the situation.²³ The local union leadership then proceeded to work with various community groups in further pressing the federal government to save the industry in the name of the "centennial spirit of national unity."²⁴

By far the most important action coming out of the popular coalition strategy

²¹ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, October 17, 1967.

²² USWA Local 1064 Minutes, October 31, 1967.

²³ Milling to Nicholson, November 3, 1967, MG 28 I 268, NAC; Cotterill to Merner, November 15, 1967, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

²⁴ Merner to All Service Clubs, Clergy-Men, Business Organizations, Schools, etc., November 9, 1967, MG 28 I 268, NAC.

was the "Parade of Concern" which was held November 19, 1967. It was reported to have been a fine demonstration of "Cape Bretoners' solidarity, singleness of purpose, and unity of action." Organized principally by union, church and civic leaders, it was attended by Federal cabinet member Allan MacEachern and Premier G.I. Smith, who were reported to have been "piped into the grandstand" amid cheers from the crowd. The principal slogan of the parade was "Save our Steel (S.O.S.)," and the tenor of the demonstration was more an appeal to government than a demand that immediate steps be taken to assure the industry's future and hold DOSCO and its parent company accountable.²⁵

The absence of a militant tone to the event, despite the anger and frustration felt by so many steel workers, can at least partly be explained by the strong leadership role played by the Catholic Church in helping to organize the event. In an interview after the parade occurred, Reverend William Roach of the Catholic Church stated that "the men were ready to tear the mill apart." He asserted that if DOSCO had tried to dismantle any of the plant, "they'd never have been able to take anything out of the plant, at least, not in one piece. The steel workers would have destroyed everything." Given the rage and frustration felt by many steel workers, according to Roach, even the police feared the worst. In order to help contain this rage, Roach and other church leaders mobilized as much of the non-union community as possible.

So we got every sister and clergyman on the Island, and
from Antigonish to take part and we got all the school

²⁵ Star Weekly: The Canadian Magazine. "They saved a stricken city", March 8, 1969.

kids.... And we spread them throughout the parade. I made sure every sister and clergyman was clearly identifiable as such. Every sister wore her habit and every clergyman his collar. We even had an Anglican bishop and our own bishop to help keep it under control.²⁶

The role played by church representatives was not the only factor that worked to contain the workers' anger. The threat of plant closure created compelling reasons why militants and oppositional leaders should join in supporting a united front of the whole community. Antagonism continued to be felt, but as the union staff representative stressed to the membership, everyone needed to set aside "any animosity we may now have toward one another and work hard to assure that this industry remains in Sydney."²⁷ Given the overall expansion that was taking place within the Canadian economy and the Canadian state at that time, the mobilization of the community in the form of a parade of concern was enough to bring the desired results. The Province, with the assistance of the federal government, took over ownership of the plant in 1968, and established the Sydney Steel Corporation (Sysco).

C) Industrial Stability and the Resumption of Intra-Union Conflict

Once government ownership was announced, an immediate goal of both the official and oppositionist leadership was to protect the pension and benefit plans established under DOSCO and to negotiate a new contract. Union officials made it

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, November 28, 1967.

clear that they would recommend to the membership that the present contract be extended if the new corporation gave guarantees on pensions, supplementary unemployment benefits, other "welfare" benefits and better vacations.²⁸ After protracted negotiations, the government and the union representatives agreed to extend the basic provisions of the contract, including wages, to April 30, 1969.²⁹ This conciliatory approach by the union leaders and the membership was applauded by Premier G.I. Smith who later stated that "Local 1064 of the United Steel Workers of America, its officers and members, and the national executive of the United Steel Workers, set high standards of labour statesmanship."³⁰

Meanwhile, the local opposition resumed its criticism of the local and district leadership. It criticized the leaders for not informing the membership that dues were to be increased at the upcoming special USWA convention. One rank-and-file member also accused them of lying to the membership about the pension plans for steel workers in Quebec. The USWA staff representative in Sydney threatened to have the member making the accusation charged under the international constitution of the union while District Director Nicholson defended the dues increase as necessary to maintain services and the strike fund.³¹

²⁸ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, January 9, February 13, 1968.

²⁹ Milling to Merner, May 23, 1968, MG 28 I 268, NAC; Park to Merner, May 23, 1968, MG 28 I 268, NAC; Cape Breton Post, June 29, 1968; Star Weekly, March 8, 1969.

³⁰ Cape Breton Post, September 26, 1968.

³¹ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, March 9, 26, 1968.

The inadequacies of the contract coupled with the unwillingness of the leadership aggressively to defend the interests of the members continued to be sources of tension between establishment and oppositional leaders. Winston Ruck, one of the oppositionists on the local executive in the late 1960's, later recounted how many of the "ardent trade unionists," as many of the established executive members called themselves, showed themselves to be:

in the hands of management because they didn't take up the problems of the workers as they should have. They found ways to pussy foot around the issue and slough it off, strictly in order to keep things on an even keel.... They really didn't understand what unionism was all about. It just became a job to them.³²

For instance, according to Ruck, rather than aggressively pursue grievances, the executive "tried to keep in good with management." Ruck recalled meetings between the union executive and management where:

We'd go down for an executive meeting with management with a number of serious grievances, and we'd end up talking about the hockey game, or the baseball game and stuff like that, you know. It used to irritate me because I could see what was going on then. Irritate me to no end. I used to be angry and I'd tell them, 'we are not here to discuss the hockey game tonight, we are here to discuss these grievances and let's get with it.'³³

Another union activist supported this view by characterizing the executive's

³² Interview with Winston Ruck, January 29, 1990, Sydney Steel Project, Skills Adjustment Study, Beaton Institute.

³³ Ibid.

performance as "passive".³⁴

When Sysco began to modernize the plant another important issue became the "contracting-out" of work to other companies and workers outside the bargaining unit. In 1969, Sydney steel workers struck over the issue without the sanction of the leadership. When a "cease and desist order" was issued by the authorities, the local president and the national leadership immediately appealed to the strikers for a return to work, arguing that "this is the law of the land and we must comply." The local president's request for a return to work was greeted with boos and jeers and one oppositionist stated that the executive had let the men down.³⁵ Before finally agreeing to end the strike, a committee elected by the strikers presented a series of proposals to the union executive which they wanted agreement on from the company. The demands of the committee included an immediate withdrawal of three outside contract companies and the disclosure of the company's production plans. However, the union executive refused to approach the company with the demands until after the strikers returned to work.³⁶

As a result, it was reported that "A split is developing within the union." But, the tension existed not just between the executive and much of the membership, but also among the executive members themselves. Staff representative Ben O'Neil joined the Local 1064 president in urging the men to return to work, but vice-president

³⁴ Dan Yakimchuk, Interview, April 15, 1993.

³⁵ Cape Breton Post (Sydney), March 12, 1969.

³⁶ Ibid.

Winston Ruck was more tempered in his reaction and more encouraging of the workers' action. He stated, "if you stay out long enough you may win," but he also reminded them that management said it would not deal with the proposals until they resumed work. Other oppositionists forcefully argued that "we must stick by our guns and see this thing through to successful conclusion" since they had already tried other measures.³⁷ Despite concerted efforts by the executive to have the men return to work, the illegal strike continued for two days.³⁸

The strike had actually occurred in the midst of contract negotiations in which the union attempted to win a contract provision that restricted the company's use of labour from outside the steel local's membership. After several months of negotiations, a conciliator was appointed, but he was also unsuccessful at bringing about an agreement.³⁹ The Premier of Nova Scotia intervened as well to help the two sides reach a settlement, but this too failed. The union executive then called a membership meeting at which the workers voted overwhelmingly in favour of strike action.⁴⁰

Despite the strike mandate, Sysco management continued to vigorously resist wage increases and other improvements to the contract.⁴¹ The company made "a

³⁷ Chronicle Herald (Halifax), March 12, 1969.

³⁸ Cape Breton Post (Sydney), March 13, 1969.

³⁹ Cape Breton Post (Sydney), March 26, April 15, 28, 30, 1969.

⁴⁰ Cape Breton Post (Sydney), May 14, 26, 31, June 3, 1969.

⁴¹ USWA Local 1064 Minutes, June 3, 10, 1969.

final offer" based on a three-year agreement with wage increases, but it refused to refrain from "contracting-out". The local and national leadership promoted the offer by emphasizing its monetary benefits. The union's Assistant Director for Canada called the contract a "turnabout" since it provided larger increases than were achieved recently by steel workers in the United States. This was reinforced by the staff representative, who also urged acceptance.⁴² However, many workers were much less impressed, and the settlement was accepted by only a very slight margin.⁴³

The disappointing contract was followed by the union leadership's ineffective response to other concerns of the rank and file. When the company announced that the plant's nail mill would be closed, the local president practically dismissed the issue, since he was assured by the company that the mill workers would be given employment in other parts of the plant. In the face of steel worker opposition to this stance, the president later protested the decision and requested that the Premier of Nova Scotia intervene to save the mill. This was to no avail, as the company refused to reverse its decision.⁴⁴

Soon after this incident, 200 maintenance workers struck because their work schedules were changed. Opposition leaders defended the action, stating that the company acted arbitrarily.⁴⁵ The local president's response to the situation was to

⁴² Cape Breton Post (Sydney), June 26, 1969.

⁴³ Cape Breton Post (Sydney), June 30, 1969.

⁴⁴ Cape Breton Post (Sydney), August 14, 15, 16, October 20, 1969.

⁴⁵ Cape Breton Post (Sydney), October 30, 1969.

urge workers to end their strike action. He lamely stated that better communication was needed between company and union. However, the only communication that the company was interested in was a reprimand of the workers. The president of Sysco sent a letter to all 1064 members warning them against taking part in illegal actions in the future.⁴⁶

Probably the single most important incident that led to widespread dissatisfaction with the established local leadership and increased support for the oppositional leadership was the refusal of the former to fight for reimbursement of worker contributions to the 1955-1965 pension plan (which had been superseded by a new plan). In 1969, the corporation insisted that although workers had contributed to the plan over the years, they would not be entitled to reimbursements until they ceased employment, even though the plan was closed. Members of the opposition and other concerned workers approached the executive with a request that it pressure the company to refund the contributions with interest. But local president Merner and the majority of executive members refused to pursue the issue.⁴⁷

In light of the executive's response, several oppositional leaders decided to organize a meeting of steel workers in order to begin legal action against the company. However, the local president denied them the use of the meeting hall. The organizers then arranged for the meeting to be held at one of the local Canadian legion halls and advertised it to all the steel workers. The response was so

⁴⁶ Cape Breton Post (Sydney), October 31, November 1, 14, 18, 1969.

⁴⁷ Don MacPherson, Interview, April 14, 1993.

overwhelming that the hall could not accommodate all those who came out to participate. The local oppositionists then asked \$3.00 from each worker so as to establish a legal fund in order to fight the company in the courts.⁴⁸

While the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia ruled against the workers, the Court of Appeals later overturned the decision and awarded the pension contribution reimbursement to the employees. The amount received by each worker was between several hundred and several thousand dollars. The opposition's success in achieving these positive results did more to heighten the opposition's credibility among the membership than did any other single event. It also emphasized the passivity and ineffectiveness of the established leadership, with the exception of local vice-president Winston Ruck, who clearly voiced support for the petitioners.⁴⁹

By early 1970, the Sydney plant's prospects were brightened by the announcement of a planned \$84 million modernization, to be completed by 1973. The company also announced a profit of over \$3 million in the previous fiscal year and boasted about record production levels since the formation of Sysco.⁵⁰ These profit and production levels were very much a direct result of the determination of the steel workers to make the plant successful and of the sacrifices made by them in lowering their wage and benefits demands. Given the improved prospects of the plant, many of

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Cape Breton Post (Sydney), February 20, March 5, 1970. Later the estimated modernization cost was increased to \$94 million. Cape Breton Post (Sydney), June 4, 1970.

them were determined to obtain some rewards for that sacrifice. However, most union members felt that such gains could not be won with the existing local executive given their recent performance on matters such as the pension issue.

D) Opposition Victory and the 1972 Strike

There was uncharacteristic interest expressed in the upcoming local union election of 1970. "Keen rivalry is expected," stated a Cape Breton Post report, because the incumbent president Martin Merner was being challenged by incumbent vice-president Winston Ruck.⁵¹ Furthermore, there were a number of well known oppositionists seeking other executive positions. Interest was said to be "at the highest peak of any election."⁵²

More than 80% of the steel workers cast votes. The result was that Ruck received twice as many votes as the incumbent president.⁵³ Other oppositionists defeated other long-standing incumbents. In fact, the entire executive was voted out of office with the exception of recording secretary Nelson Muise and Winston Ruck.⁵⁴ The newly elected president explained the dramatic rejection of the incumbents in

⁵¹ Cape Breton Post (Sydney), May 2, June 10, 1970.

⁵² Cape Breton Post (Sydney), June 24, 1970.

⁵³ Winston Ruck was the first black man elected as President of the Local. His election, therefore, was not only a significant event in the union's history, but also an important one for the entire black community of Sydney.

⁵⁴ Cape Breton Post (Sydney), July 4, 1970.

terms of a demonstrated "lack of leadership" by the incumbent president. However, according to Ruck, the real problem was that there was "a lack of confidence in the former president and not the union executive as a whole." The president "did not do his job well and other executive officers went down to defeat with him."⁵⁵

The victory of the opposition was significant in historical terms as well as in terms of the immediate impact it had on the local. The election of a slate of oppositionists to the local executive had not happened in the history of the union. It brought to office the most left-wing and progressive executive since the united front executive of the late 1930's and early 1940's. It interrupted the virtually unbroken stream of establishment-dominated executives. The single re-elected executive member associated with the previous executive claimed to have been marginalized and ignored by other executive members.⁵⁶ The election victory was also defeat for the national and international leadership, which had been very supportive of the various establishment local executives.

The success of the oppositionists was due in part to the adoption of a more coherent election campaign, which clarified for the membership the differences between the groups. Throughout the previous decade, oppositionists had worked closely together in challenging the established leadership and advocating alternative policies and practices. However, unlike the situation at STELCO's local 1005,

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Interview with Nelson Muise, March 27, 1990, Sydney Steel Project, Skills Adjustment Study, Beaton Institute.

opposition leaders had never formally organized themselves or even met regularly to strategize for the election. While they had not presented themselves as a formal "slate" of candidates, many steel workers knew from past experience and informal networks which activists stood together against the establishment officials.

This newest group of oppositionists represented several generations of activists. Winston Ruck, who was considered by most workers to be an honest but not a radical trade unionist, had become active in the union in 1956 at the urging of one-time communist Frank Smith, whose involvement in the union went back to the 1946 strike. Ruck was also greatly influenced by the fiercely independent-minded Jim Ryan, who led the opposition during the 1960's. Other influences on Ruck included "committee men" such as Cecil Palmer, who had never served on the executive of the union. In evaluating the impact and performance of these unionists, Ruck stated:

Cecil, Jim.... Frank Smith.... These were the forerunners. These were experienced trade unionists. Very fearless. When they met with management, they had quite a session. They were fearless, because if you're honest in your presentation you have nothing to fear, have you? That's the way they operated. I used to be amazed at them.... I was impressed with those guys and some of that rubbed off on me.⁵⁷

As union members in the 1940's, Frank Smith and Jim Ryan represented an older generation of activists with connections to radicals such as George MacEachern, the prominent steel worker activist and communist who served as a member of the first

⁵⁷ Interview with Winston Ruck., April 29, 1990, Sydney Steel Project, Skills Adjustment Study, Beaton Institute.

local 1064 executive.⁵⁸

The new executive represented a break with the CCF/NDP anti-communist leadership, which had dominated the union local since 1946. In fact, executive members Frank Smith and Don MacPherson were or had been members of the Communist Party of Canada. Two other members, Ruck and Ryan, were independent activists who never fully embraced the CCF or the NDP.⁵⁹ However, it is important to understand that the members of the new executive did not represent the radicalism of the 1930's and 1940's. They were not connected to one another or the larger working-class movement by an organization other than the union itself. The cold war, anti-communist period of the 1950's had decimated the left and broke the radical tradition within the union movement. The isolation of USWA locals from each other and the entrenchment of top-down bureaucratic practices limited the possibility for connection to other progressive forces. Two and a half decades of "responsible" unionism and "industrial democracy" limited the response of even the most militant and progressive executive members. "Responsible" unionism was not overthrown by the election of the opposition. Instead, the executive showed itself willing to test the limits of "responsible" unionism as well as "industrial democracy".

Within these constraints, the new executive showed itself to be able and willing to use a variety of tactics in pursuit of contract demands. It pursued

⁵⁸ Don MacPherson, Interview, April 14, 1993.

⁵⁹ Ibid., Nelson Muise claimed that there were only two members of the executive who were strongly supportive of the NDP. Interview with Nelson Muise, March 27, 1990, Sydney Steel Project, Skills Adjustment Study, Beaton Institute.

membership demands with more vigour and aggressiveness than did the previous executive, but it also showed a disciplined and tempered approach to problems. It immediately made pensions a priority in negotiations and sought an agreement with the company to allow voluntary retirement for men aged 55-65 with full pensions to be awarded at age 62 rather than 65. While many workers wanted to strike immediately over such issues, the new leadership advised against it and called for a more calculated response to the problem.⁶⁰ The union leadership also moved aggressively to secure construction jobs at the plant for its members and resist the "unprincipled muscling in" by construction trades unions.⁶¹ When the wire and nail mill ceased operation and was then sold to a firm in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, the union leadership strongly protested the action.⁶²

The new executive also showed militant leadership by leading the workers in illegal strike action. While wages and pensions were identified as the major issues in the negotiations for a new collective agreement in early 1972, these were suddenly put aside when the company announced its intention to close the plant's bar mill within two months.⁶³ Fifteen hundred steel workers immediately struck in protest over the announced closure. This action apparently had the complete backing of the union executive, and President Ruck emphasized to provincial politicians that the strikers

⁶⁰ Cape Breton Post, October 12, 13, 1970; March 6, 1971.

⁶¹ Cape Breton Post (Sydney), February 8, 16, 1971.

⁶² Cape Breton Post (Sydney), March 30, 1971.

⁶³ Chronicle Herald (Halifax), June 13, 1972.

were determined to remain on strike until Sysco reversed its decision.⁶⁴ However, after four days on strike, a compromise was reached when the workers agreed to return to work while a joint labour-management committee would take up to 90 days to examine possible options for the mill.⁶⁵ The strike action resulted in the postponement of the bar mill's closure for several years.

Regular contract negotiations then resumed, but quickly broke off when management's two year wage offer fell far short of the union's demand for a 75-cent increase over one year.⁶⁶ A conciliation board was immediately appointed, but it was unable to resolve the differences.⁶⁷ The union leadership publicized the fact that Sydney's base wage rate was 51.7 cents behind that of Algoma and STELCO and that the gap in other job categories was even higher.⁶⁸ The Sydney workers voted 2,020 to 99 in favour of strike as an expression of their determination to catch up with other steel workers and protect themselves against inflation.⁶⁹ They rejected a last minute Sysco offer of an 80-cent increase over two years and were said to be exerting

⁶⁴ Cape Breton Post (Sydney), June 15, 17, 1972; Chronicle Herald (Halifax), June 13, 1972.

⁶⁵ Cape Breton Post (Sydney), June 19, 20, 1972.

⁶⁶ Cape Breton Post (Sydney), July 5, 13, 1972.

⁶⁷ Cape Breton Post (Sydney), July 15, 28, 1972.

⁶⁸ Cape Breton Post (Sydney), August 10, 11, 1972. Wages had also failed to keep pace with those of other workers. Sydney municipal workers had overtaken steel workers as the highest paid wage workers in the community.

⁶⁹ Cape Breton Post (Sydney), August 22, 1972.

"strong pressure" on the union leadership "not to compromise their demands."⁷⁰

Despite both the company and government's warning that it would be a "monumental disaster", the steel workers struck.⁷¹ For the first time in over 25 years Sydney steel workers had launched a legal plant-wide strike. After more than a month on strike the company offered a 26-month contract with a 95-cent or 33.5% increase in wages. This was considered a victory by the workers.⁷²

Unlike earlier strikes, there was less direct participation by the national union representatives in the negotiation process. The local basically pursued its own goals, which included basic wage parity with Ontario plants. While not as significant as the 1946 strike, which established base wage parity among unionized basic steel plants, it at least reestablished parity as a goal. The union even negotiated a clause that would grant Sydney steel workers wage parity with STELCO if the Sydney plant achieved the productivity of the Ontario plants.⁷³ This victory guaranteed the return to office of Winston Ruck and much of the incumbent executive in the local elections of 1973.⁷⁴ Because of such developments, the Sydney local regained some of the prominence which it had once enjoyed within the Canadian section of the USWA. It also regained its reputation as a progressive local within the labour movement.

⁷⁰ Chronicle Herald (Halifax), September 18, 20, 22, 1972.

⁷¹ Cape Breton Post (Sydney), September 22, 25, 1972.

⁷² Chronicle Herald (Halifax), October 27, 1972.

⁷³ Interview with Nelson Muise, 1990, Op.cit.

⁷⁴ Cape Breton Post (Sydney), June 27, 1973.

E) Conclusion

The takeover of the plant by the provincial government was facilitated by the continuing high demand for steel and the generally buoyant economy of the late 1960's. The success of the 1972 strike was undoubtedly due in large part to the improved position of the Sydney steel industry in the immediate post-1967 period. That steel workers took advantage of these developments can be understood by drawing on contemporary marxist views on the relations of class forces at particular stages of capitalist development. But, these accomplishments were also made possible by a determined work force infused with young expectant workers and led by a new militant leadership that challenged established union leaders.

The new executive was the first one in the history of the local to displace an establishment executive. While the opposition had retreated somewhat in the crisis years of 1966-67 due to the need for coalition building, it returned stronger than ever and finally took over leadership of the local. The presence of such a strong opposition raises questions about the importance of their role in the steel workers' accomplishments during the late 1960's and early 1970's. In so doing, it recalls the importance which classical Marxists attached to the leaders of workers' organizations in terms of whether they attempted to develop or limit their membership's potential.

The ascendancy of the opposition was made possible by the obvious failure of the established leadership on particular issues and the ability of the opposition to capitalize on this. It was also aided by the revitalization of the industry and the raised expectations of the workforce. The strategy of placing a "slate" of alternative leaders

before the membership and thereby clearly presenting them with an alternative also contributed to the opposition victory. The opposition within the Sydney local, however, was not as organized as that at STELCO where the opposition had become "institutionalized" into a number of factions which ran slates during union elections.⁷⁵ Nor did the local 1064 opposition develop links with the STELCO local opposition and that of other locals so as to challenge the national and international leadership as was done to some degree by the opposition within the UAW. The latter situation, according to Yates, was made possible in large part because of the organizational structure of the UAW's Canadian region with its autonomous Canadian Council which offered a forum for rank-and-file dissent.⁷⁶

The structure of the USWA did not promote inter-local cooperation and a united opposition. The roots of the opposition at Sydney and Hamilton were similar in that they spoke to many of the same issues. But, they were not organizationally linked, and therefore did not seriously challenge the power of the national and international USWA leadership. They were nonetheless important in so far as they changed the nature of the union at the local level.

The election of the opposition and the militant unionism which they represented disputes Michels' contention of the immutability of oligarchy and the futility of leadership renewal. While the USWA structure was not changed, the persistent efforts by opposition forces and their eventual electoral success at the local

⁷⁵ Bill Freeman, 1982, *op. cit.*, pp. 176-77.

⁷⁶ Charlotte Yates, 1993, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

level did make a difference.

The election of an oppositionist executive and the success of the strike did not mean that "responsible" unionism was overthrown at Sydney. But, it was seriously challenged as was the form of "industrial democracy" that was instituted within the steel industry. Within the crisis-ridden Sydney steel industry "industrial democracy" and the practice of "responsible" unionism showed themselves as inadequate in defending the basic interests of the steel workers.

CONCLUSION: BRINGING INTRA-UNION CONFLICT BACK INTO THE DEBATE ABOUT TRADE UNION DEVELOPMENTS

A) The Importance of Intra-Union Conflict and How It Has Been Neglected

This study of the Sydney steel workers and their union has attempted to demonstrate the importance of intra-union conflict as a mediating factor in understanding changes within the steel workers' union and its relationship with employers and the state. In so doing, it began with the limitations of theories of union developments which have either ignored intra-union struggles or failed to understand their connection to larger societal change. Due to the many branches and streams within the Marxist and Michelsian traditions it is difficult to generalize, but there has been a tendency for each of these perspectives to avoid the issue of intra-union conflict or to isolate it from its social context.

The Marxists

Classical Marxists, as we saw in Chapter II, placed considerable emphasis on what was happening inside workers' organizations and movements, although they did not conduct in-depth analyses of unions. They were concerned with how such organizations could support or retard wider revolutionary change. The potential of workers' organizations was viewed by them to be related to larger social conditions. It was also associated with the connection which workers and their leaders had to other movements and organizations, in particular revolutionary or socialist ones.

Gramsci discussed the connection between the larger social and political

environment and the specific goals and principles unions followed. He argued that only a union's general form, and not its specific character, was predetermined by outside forces, in particular by the stage of capitalist development and the political arrangements which supported it. A union's combativeness and effectiveness was very much influenced by internal union developments such as the relations between union leaders and the membership. A union, according to Gramsci, "takes on a definite historical form to the extent that the strength and will of the workers who are its members impress a policy and propose an aim that define it."¹ With Gramsci and other classical Marxists, historical contingency and human agency are key to understanding the development and potential of such organizations. However, human agency is not expressed only in terms of the class conflict between labour and capital, but is also represented in terms of struggles that occur **within** the labour movement and workers' organizations.

The same emphasis on both types of human agency is not as clearly stated among certain contemporary neo-marxists who ignore intra-union struggles. Consequently, they tend to view union developments only in terms of the major changes occurring within capitalism and the state, instead of also understanding the mediating role of union politics and the struggles that are central to them. That these larger changes are seen as the outcome of class conflict themselves, still does not address the importance of intra-union conflict. As we saw in Chapters II and III, the importance of intra-union struggles is seldom commented on by contemporary

¹ Antonio Gramsci, 1977. op. cit., p. 265.

Marxists. If mentioned by them they are usually treated as little more than negligible by-products of the contradictions of capitalist development and the class struggle. Drache and Glasbeek, Fantasia, Goldfield and Moody among others mention them as important developments, but there is little exploration of their significance. Other contemporary Marxists such as Davis and Mandel have argued more strongly about the importance of intra-union struggles, in particular those between union officials and the rank and file. Labour and social historians have also focused on intra-union conflict, but they rarely study unions in the post World War II era. Studies of contemporary unions in Canada which attribute great significance to intra-union conflicts are therefore few in number. Those by Freeman and Yates, which have been referred to throughout the dissertation, are two such notable examples.

Unions are obviously a part of a larger social world which generates problems and opportunities for unions and their members. Indeed, as this study demonstrated, certain strategic options are closed or opened to unions because of changes within the economic, political and social environment. However, despite the limitations and restrictions imposed by the larger social environment, the way in which union members respond to particular societal change is not limited to a single response. It is not predetermined, automatic, mechanical or uniform. What is perceived as the response of a particular union is the product of the different and often competing views and perceptions of its members and their ability to unite and mobilize in response to particular opportunities or obstacles. An important aspect of this is whether the union's organizational structure, and the leadership which occupy leading

positions within it, facilitate such unity and mobilization.

In keeping with a Marxist perspective, the dissertation calls attention to major developments which occur within the larger union movement, the steel industry and Canadian society and how they affected steel workers and their union. Changes within the steel workers' union are placed specifically in the context of two important and interrelated developments, the establishment of a particular form of "industrial democracy" and the encouragement and adaption of "responsible" unionism. The dissertation sees these as important aspects of what has been referred to by contemporary Marxists as the post-war compromise or accord between labour and capital.

The dissertation differs from many of the studies discussed in Chapters II and III in that it explores **the support for and resistance to the establishment** of "industrial democracy" and "responsible" unionism and the intra-union conflicts that arise as part of the process. There was no critique of "industrial democracy" and "responsible" unionism per se by oppositionists. But the version advanced by the national and international union leadership, especially certain aspects of each, were resisted by significant elements among the steel workers during the 1940's, as was shown in chapters IV, V and VI. Even when "responsible" unionism and "industrial democracy" were successfully established within the steel industry by the early 1950's, their limitations continued to be exposed throughout the remainder of the period under study as shown in Chapters VII, VIII and IX. The dissertation supports the Marxist view that these two important developments were the outcome of class

conflict and class compromise. However, it demonstrates that they were also in a sense mediated through intra-union struggles.

Michelsian Theory

If contemporary Marxist studies of unionism have largely ignored or minimized the importance of intra-union relations as an aspect of class conflict, Michels and his adherents have focused on union organization and internal relations in a way which tended to isolate them from larger societal developments. While Michels' theory was inspired by what he considered to be the development of oligarchy within nominally radical and democratic organizations such as the Social Democratic Party of Germany, it did not place these changes within the context of capitalist development or other societal transformations.

Oligarchy, according to Michels, is the principal problem facing the members of political parties and unions. It is rooted in the very nature of organization, he argues, and it is unavoidable in large organizations because:

[T]he principle of organization is an absolutely essential condition for the political struggle of the masses.

Yet this politically necessary principle of organization, while it overcomes that disorganization of forces which would be favorable to the adversary, brings other dangers in its train. We escape Scylla only to dash ourselves on Charybdis. Organization is in fact, the source from which the conservative currents flow over the plain of democracy, occasioning there disastrous floods and rendering the plain unrecognizable.²

² Robert Michels, 1962, op. cit., p. 62.

The rise of oligarchy within organizations, in Michels' view, is also very much linked to "the technical indispensability of [expert] leadership" and the "passivity" and "objective immaturity" of the mass of workers.³

Michels brilliantly described the problems which some unions and political parties were experiencing, but the study of the steel workers' union does not support Michels' theory as an explanation of how such problems arose. The USWA leadership was not defending only the organizational form which protected their power, but also "responsible" unionism as an ideology and a practice linked to "industrial democracy". The very survival of the organization as it existed could not be separated from, and was actually predicated on, the maintenance of both "industrial democracy" and "responsible" unionism. The successful meshing and interdependence of the two was based on compromise between unions and employers, but also on the containment of radical or militant union elements. Michels did not connect specific organizational structures and processes with such economic and political developments and the struggles which were a part of them.

Furthermore, the growth of the steel workers' union as a more bureaucratic and increasingly conservative organization is not explained by the incompetence and apathy of the masses, as maintained by Michels, but in the membership's eventual acceptance of the ideology and practice of "responsible" unionism and the establishment of a form of "industrial democracy" as indicated in Chapters IV, V and VI. The foundation of these developments was an expanding economy. While

³ Ibid. pp. 364, 367.

economic and political factors encouraged the embrace of "responsible" unionism and a restricted form of "industrial democracy", it is important to acknowledge that these developments occurred over the protests of many steel workers and the acquiescence of others. They did not automatically flow, as suggested by Michels' theory, from greater organizational bureaucracy.

Other Perspectives

As discussed in Chapter II, some contemporary non-marxists such as Golden and Ruttenburg (1942) and Lester (1958) uncritically accepted the post-war trend towards greater institutionalization of conflict, emphasizing the social stability and the greater material benefits to workers that resulted from it. The suppression of dissenters and oppositionists was considered by them as necessary, as was the ascendancy of what is referred to in the dissertation as "responsible" unionism. Indeed, the winning of "industrial democracy" and the entrenchment of "responsible" unionism based on state mediation, minimal worker mobilization and the containment of radical and militant union activists, who had a vision of a larger role for workers and unions, was an unequivocally positive development.

If these restrictions and limitations were considered necessary and beneficial by many contemporary non-marxists, others were critical of these developments. As discussed in Chapter II, C. Wright Mills thought that such developments promoted a new elite that acted as "managers of discontent" rather than leaders that sought to build radical movements. Many USWA leaders played the role of "managers of

discontent", but as we saw in Chapters IV through IX, this entailed acting in ways which minimized or undermined some of the legitimate demands of many steel workers. On the other hand, they did use membership discontent as a lever with the employer and thus negotiated concessions that could be acceptable to the membership. While Mills understood this role as one which union officials continually played, I found that oppositional groups and movements served a dual purpose in their role as a counter-force to concession-minded union officials. First, oppositional forces challenged the union leadership to take a more militant stance and resist making concessions. This was evident in the late 1930's, 1940's and 1960's when the opposition was at its strongest as shown in Chapters IV, V, VI, VIII and IX. Secondly, the evidence from these chapters also suggest that increased oppositional activity enabled union officials to play their role better in the sense that it offered them a greater lever in negotiations with the employer.

Offe understood the negative aspects of increased bureaucratization and institutionalization, but he also down-played and underestimated the resistance of oppositional forces since they do not appear in his theoretical schema until the fourth of four stages of union development. Offe's suggestion that union radicalism would arise and become prominent at the end of a long period of union stagnation and setback is partially supported by the thesis. Opposition and resistance within the SWOC/USWA never ceased completely for the entire period under study, something which is not accounted for in Offe's schema. Resistance eventually intensified as workers' rights and benefits were increasingly assaulted by the company, but as

Chapters VIII and IX indicate, the return to militancy suggested by Offe did not correspond to that experienced in the founding years of the SWOC. The militancy of the 1960's and early 1970's was not linked to a wider class-conscious radicalism as was the case in the late 1930's and 1940's. The later wave of militancy had largely, but not entirely, accepted the limits imposed by "responsible" unionism and "industrial democracy". The experience of the USWA indicates that there was an ebb and flow to oppositional resistance related to the material and social conditions as well as the opposition's strength and degree of organization.

B) Oppositional Movements Do Make a Difference

Michels' "iron law of oligarchy" emphasizes that attempts by anti-oligarchical and democratic forces to resist and overthrow oligarchy are essentially futile. Michels admitted that "[i]t cannot be denied that the masses revolt from time to time, but their revolts are always suppressed."⁴ He also conceded that "[t]he currents of history resemble successive waves. They break ever on the same shoal. They are ever renewed."⁵ As discussed in Chapter II, however, Gouldner used Michels' own argument about the recurring revolts among the "masses" as support for his contention that it could also be argued that there is an "iron law of democracy". The persistence of oppositional activity within the USWA certainly supports Gouldner's argument.

⁴ Ibid. p. 170.

⁵ Ibid. p.371.

These attempts at restoring democracy are never successful, according to Michels, because the leaders of such movements "end by fusing with the old dominant class."⁶ Rank-and-file leaders become new members of the ruling elite and in effect share power with more established members of the elite.⁷ Michels' conclusions on the failure of oppositional movements and the shortcomings of opposition leaders do not entirely correspond to developments within the USWA. Rank-and-file leaders did sometimes become part of the established leadership and accommodate to the latter, but this was not always the case. Jim Ryan remained antagonistic to the established leaders even after he won election to the executive. Other oppositionists such as Ed Corbett and George MacNeil eventually cooperated with the established leadership on many issues, but they still opposed them on others and were never completely accepted. In any case, when they later became more moderate or conservative, it was in response to the restrictions imposed by "responsible" unionism, the limitations of "industrial democracy" and the larger socio-economic environment. In this regard, the change of an oppositionist's behaviour in response to wider societal conditions, supports a Marxist approach rather than a Michelsian one.

The fact that an establishment-dominated executive⁸ governed the Sydney local from 1946 to 1970 lends support to Michels' claims about the tendency for elites to

⁶ *Ibid.* 371.

⁷ *Ibid.* 343.

⁸ An "establishment-dominated" executive or leadership is one that consists entirely or principally of local union officials who support the national and international leadership as well as the general policies and direction of the union.

perpetuate themselves. The established leadership's control over union resources such as the means of communication certainly promoted their long tenure in power.

However, Michels' assertion that such longevity is rooted in the need for technical expertise and the general incompetence and apathy of the membership is not entirely supported by the study. Technical expertise was somewhat concentrated in the hands of paid staff and union representatives, but many oppositionists who served as stewards or "committee men" possessed as much expertise as members of the local 1064 executive. They were knowledgeable and capable rank-and-file union members who were willing to fill the various leadership positions within the union. The established leadership used its political position and power, not just its technical expertise, to contain the opposition. They rallied the support required in order to get elected, and stay elected, by promoting particular strategies and policies while opposing those of the opposition. These strategies and policies included moderate collective bargaining demands, respect for management's rights, and opposition to radical ideologies and organizations. Together they amounted to an acceptance and promotion of "responsible" unionism and a restricted form of "industrial democracy".

It is also clear from the findings of the study that opposition movements did make a difference, even when their leaders did not hold executive positions.

Undoubtedly, the differences did not amount to sweeping organizational and structural change and supports Michels' contention that opposition movements do not produce essential and lasting change. Regardless of their strength, according to Michels, oppositional movements fail to overthrow oligarchy and establish democracy since the

organization's structure and functioning remain basically the same. Gouldner's argument about the "iron law of democracy" clearly would not impress Michels' since such oppositional efforts represent only failed democracy. Even the victory by the local opposition in 1970, which brought about a completely new leadership with a new style and a much more militant and aggressive approach to defending the interests of the membership, does not qualify as the kind of change that would negate Michels' argument.

However, the opposition was unable to change the whole organization because it was fragmented on a local basis and could not effectively intervene at the national level. This suggests that although organizational structure and processes may appear immune from localized and disorganized attempts to change them, a coordinated effort on the part of various local forces might succeed in achieving such change. And yet, the SWOC/USWA experience shows that the organization's established leadership resisted attempts to build horizontal links between locals which would promote an organized inter-local opposition. The leadership's determination and ability to restrict area and regional councils and other forms of inter-local contact, as discussed in Chapters IV, V, VI and VII, suggests that it is unfair to evaluate the effects of a local opposition on a national organization. That change at the local level is limited by the wider structure of society as well as the larger union lends support to the marxist view that "external" problems are mirrored or reproduced within such organizations. Nonetheless, the union structure's resistance to change lends credibility to Michels' contention that organizations are often extremely difficult if not impossible to

transform in basic ways.

The history of the Sydney steel workers shows that oppositional movements placed checks or limits upon union officials. The success of the opposition in this regard varied according to their strength relative to that of the established leadership and their supporters. Oppositional forces who resisted the push by national and international leaders towards "responsible" unionism and a severely restricted form of "industrial democracy" were present almost at the inception of Local 1064. As Chapter IV has demonstrated, in the 1937 to 1942 period the thrust of the opposition was towards calls for greater autonomy for the local union and the Canadian section of the union. The desire for greater autonomy was rooted in the opposition to the more accommodationist and less democratic approach being pursued by the highest levels of leadership. While the opposition was unable to win greater autonomy and a more democratic structure they were partially successful at temporarily pressuring the leadership to be more responsive to their demands. The evidence presented in Chapters V indicates that the opposition-led strike of 1943 pressured the government to escalate its review of the steel industry and industrial relations problems within it despite the resistance to such action by the union's highest ranking officials. Chapters V and VI suggest that without the pressure from oppositional forces the 1946 strike would have been further postponed by the national leadership, and that the strike settlement might have been less of a victory for the Sydney steel workers. It was also oppositional leaders who led the effort to strengthen the seniority system in the late 1950's and early 1960's. Chapter VIII examines how in the early 1960's the

oppositionists led the efforts to prevent the company from totally implementing the Proudfoot Company's recommended changes to work schedules and work routines. In the late 1960's and early 1970's, as demonstrated in Chapter IX, oppositionists successfully led the struggles for reimbursement of pension money, delaying the closure of the Bar Mill and winning of substantial gains in the 1972 strike.

These successes were undoubtedly connected to changing social conditions but it cannot be assumed that the established leadership would have pursued the same course or achieved the same success. The oppositional leaders and their supporters sometimes challenged the employers and the government in a way which tested the limits of industrial democracy and responsible unionism, something which the establishment leadership did rarely. Oppositionists were unable or unwilling to frontally attack "responsible" unionism and "industrial democracy", but they opposed the most restrictive aspects of both. Rather than articulating a new form of unionism, or a new kind of relationship with the employer, the opposition fought for many small but important changes. Their resistance prevented further erosion of wages, benefits and union democracy.

The experience of the Sydney steel workers also lends support to the Marxist view that the possibilities for organizational change are very much related to developments within the larger social environment. Economic growth and the credibility of radical political views that flourished in the late 1930's and early 1940's certainly promoted oppositional activity as indicated in Chapters IV and V. This was especially so since the opposition movement within the steel workers' union during

this period was connected to larger social movements, the aim of which were to bring about radical social change. In a similar vein, Chapters VI and VII examine how the cold-war, anti-communist political environment in conjunction with the economic growth of the 1950's greatly restricted oppositional activity.

As "industrial democracy" and "responsible" unionism were established and entrenched within the industrial relations fabric of Canadian society, the opposition became more limited in terms of the changes they could advocate or hope to achieve. Certainly, any links to a revolutionary project or movement were broken by the early 1950's when "industrial democracy" and "responsible" unionism were firmly established within the steel industry, as indicated in Chapter VII. Oppositionists no longer spoke against capitalism and for revolutionary socialism and the need for the union to support such a cause. Action based on solidarity with progressive forces outside the union movement was limited to support for the CCF. Virtually all progress was measured in terms of what could be accomplished in collective bargaining or through support for the CCF. The winning of "industrial democracy" and the entrenchment of "responsible" unionism in the late 1940's and early 1950's heralded an increasingly institutionalized approach to conflict in which decisions were further removed from the membership and oppositional members were marginalized. These outcomes are in keeping with Michels' description of the way in which unions develop although the driving force behind them, and resistance to them, are different than those examined by Michels.

In the 1960's and early 1970's, as Chapters VIII and IX demonstrate,

oppositional activity intensified due to the crisis faced by the Sydney steel industry and the intransigence of the company. When oppositionists won election to union positions, they were in a better position to make small incremental changes such as more effectively enforcing the contract and setting the agenda for negotiations with the employer. When only a few oppositionists were elected to an establishment-dominated executive, they were quite restricted in their ability to make changes. This was certainly the case with Jim Ryan when he was elected president in 1962 as was documented in Chapter VIII. As Chapter V shows it was also the case with George MacNeil in the 1942-46 period when he was president of an executive that was becoming supportive of the national and international leadership. However, MacNeil was much more accommodating to the establishment leadership in the late 1950's when oppositional forces were quite weak. When the steel corporation attempted to make steel workers carry the burden of the crisis in the late 1950's and early 1960's, the latter resisted. They not only opposed DOSCO industrial strategy but also pressured union officials to take more aggressive stances in contract bargaining with the employer. They also pushed them to build greater links between steel workers of other locals, as well as other workers. The pressure took various forms, including debate at union meetings, public criticisms in the press, and job action that defied the union leadership as well as DOSCO.

The widening embrace of "industrial democracy" and "responsible" unionism in conjunction with the material advances that came with economic prosperity, as documented in Chapters VI and VII, placed limits on the growth of radicalism among

the steel workers and any call for radical solutions. However, these periods of industrial growth and prosperity raised expectations among Sydney steel workers for continued parity with their Ontario counterparts and the provision of shorter hours of work, higher wages and more benefits. The industrial decline of the Sydney industry, and the recurring crisis within it, lowered the expectations of Sydney steel workers, but also placed great pressure on established leaders who were seen as ineffective in addressing problems (see Chapters VII and VIII).

That the forces external to the union were tremendously important to bringing about change within the union and the industry, supports the Marxist perspective on class conflict and its relation to union development. That socio-economic conditions could have contradictory effects in terms of the success of the opposition in marshalling support from the membership and challenging the established leaders, strategies and policies of the union also lends support to the Marxist view rather than the Michelsian perspective. However, there is a tendency among some Marxists to overlook the role of oppositional movements as agents of change as well as its product. This problem is avoided by paying attention to intra-union conflicts.

This study demonstrates that leadership does make a difference. For the steel workers, it was not the difference between revolution and total subjection. Nor was it the difference between total accommodation and the complete overthrowing of "responsible" unionism and a limited form of "industrial democracy" that had been established. Instead, it was the difference between aggressively challenging the employer and the state on the issues of basic union rights and material gains, and

accommodating to the employer's demands to the point where steel workers lost what was gained in the past.

C) The Relationship between "Responsible" Unionism and "Industrial Democracy"

The analysis of conflict between oppositional and establishment forces within local 1064 of the USWA has focused on the competing strategies, policies and practices within the union. The conflicting strategies and policies of the opposition and establishment leadership largely have revolved around the benefits and disadvantages associated with "industrial democracy" and "responsible" unionism. Clearly, the close relationship between "responsible" unionism and "industrial democracy" within the Canadian steel industry is evident in the way the two were mutually dependent on one another.

The trend towards bureaucratization, dependence on legalistic expertise, and the choice not to rely on membership mobilization was not merely an outcome of "industrial democracy". As Moody has argued, and the experience of the steel workers shows, bureaucratization was a "necessary precondition" for "the stabilization of the bargaining process".⁹ As Chapters IV and V demonstrate, the move towards bureaucratization, dependence of legal expertise and the minimal mobilization of the membership was also a strategy that was consciously pursued by an establishment-dominated leadership which saw in it an easier and safer way of winning a form of "industrial democracy", albeit a restricted one. The USWA leadership showed itself

⁹ Kim Moody, 1988. op. cit., p. 29.

quite willing to accommodate to the needs of capital and the state by lowering the demands of the workers as part of their role as mediators in building compromise between workers and the employers. They were also willing to dismiss or not hire staff representatives who were communists, or their close allies, since they would be objectionable to the state and the employers. Finally, they were willing to discipline members of the union through red-baiting, censorship and even denying them membership and participation in the union. These actions preceded as well as coincided with the establishment of "industrial democracy". They were carried out as part and parcel of a strategy designed to convince employers and the state that union officials were "responsible" unionists and deserving of their full recognition and cooperation. This strategy was resisted by steel workers who wanted a form of "industrial democracy" that provided them with much more discretion in the workplace and greater freedom in deciding the union's internal affairs.

When "industrial democracy" at Sydney steel was undermined by the employers in the early 1960's, as documented in Chapter VIII, it led to a crisis within "responsible" unionism. Oppositional forces challenged the employers' right to make decisions about production and investment, and in doing so they challenged responsible unionism and the leadership that practised and defended it. They also objected to the erosion of solidarity in bargaining among Canadian basic steel workers. They fought hardest to maintain the unified bargaining approach which achieved basic wage parity and "industrial democracy" through the 1946 strike. When this bargaining approach was quickly abandoned by the leadership the opposition also

fought hardest to maintain pattern bargaining despite its limitations. With the revival of the industry in the late 1960's, it was oppositionists who led the fight to win back past concessions and to even put wage parity with Ontario steel workers back on the agenda. In doing so they had to combat the lack of resolve on the part of USWA leaders and the limitations of "responsible" unionism as well as "industrial democracy".

D) The Variety of Oppositional Forms and The Importance of Unity within the Opposition

In addition to demonstrating the importance of intra-union struggles and their mediating relationship to the larger social environment, the thesis also illuminates the various forms that oppositional forces can take and how effective or ineffective they can be. In the case of the SWOC/USWA, there was an identifiable opposition virtually from the union's inception. This was in response to the hierarchial, bureaucratic and undemocratic practices that were introduced and maintained by the union's international and national leadership as documented in Chapters IV and V.

The study found that neither the rank and file perspective nor the factionalist approach outlined in Chapter II were entirely satisfactory in analyzing intra-union conflict. While the leadership at times was opposed by the vast majority of rank and file members as in the late 1930's and early 1940's (see Chapter IV and V), at other times they were opposed by a seemingly small faction of activists such as in the 1950's (see Chapter VII). In each case the opposition was led by members who criticized the establishment leadership and attempted to win the support of wider

sections of the rank and file. Both oppositional and establishment leaders had a base of support among the membership which argues against a factionalist approach.

Factions or groups of contending leaders were continuously attempting to win the consent of the rank and file and so assume legitimate leadership of the union local. However, because the emphasis was on organizing and winning rank-and-file support the factionalist perspective is inadequate. At specific moments such as in the 1938 to 1942 period (see Chapter IV) and during the Proudfoot episode in the early 1960's (see Chapter VII), the establishment leadership was so unpopular that a rank-and-file perspective is supported. Nonetheless, the importance of factional leaders, whether oppositional or establishment, as initiators of change and organizers of the membership lends support to the factionalist perspective. In the 1950's the oppositionists were so few in number and isolated from much of the membership that they could readily be identified as a faction.

The degree of success the opposition had in winning support determined the ease with which they could be dismissed by the established leadership. The nationalist and autonomy movements of the late 1930's and early 1940's enjoyed widespread support among the steel workers and elicited promises of reform from the union leadership as demonstrated in Chapter IV. Even with such success oppositional leaders were not treated as leaders of a rank-and-file movement. Instead, they were viewed as "irresponsible" and red-baiting among other means were used to discredit them. The attempts to isolate and discredit oppositionists had the effect of weakening the movement which they led. At times the established leadership could contain the

opposition so effectively that their influence was only felt at the local level as was the case in the late 1940's and 1950's (see Chapters VI and VII). At other times, such as in the 1960's and early 1970's, the opposition intervened at the national level through resolutions to the national conferences, although they were usually defeated there.

The available evidence suggests that individual support for either establishment or oppositional leaders was at various times related to political ideology, occupation, wage level and degree of job security. However, there is not enough evidence to make definite statements about these relationships and much more research needs to be done on this issue. There are, however, examples of evidence that suggest that better paid skilled workers with longer service and more job security tended to support the establishment leadership, while those who were unskilled, less well paid and enjoying less job security tended to support oppositional leaders. Also those who were staunch supporters of the CCF tended to make up the hard core of support for the establishment leadership. Communists, independent radicals and nationalists tended to become the leading activists among the opposition.

The effectiveness of the opposition and its influence among the membership can be understood in terms of the opposition's cohesion or lack of it. The unity among oppositional elements was an important factor which affected the ability of established leaders to resist oppositional forces. The opposition could consist of several factions, streams or tendencies each of which had some level of support within the membership. In the late 1930's and early 1940's the opposition consisted of nationalists, independent militants and communist activists (see Chapter IV). In this

period it had wide-based support among the membership, but due in part to the disunity among elements within it, it was only partially successful in its resistance to the established national and international leadership. The union was established through a united front of activists who included social democrats, communists, nationalist and independent militants and radicals, but this united front did not extend to united opposition to the bureaucratic and accommodationist stance of the national and international leaders (see Chapter V).

Despite their large base of support and the importance of local 1064 to the entire union, oppositional forces were unable to prevent the international and national union leadership from setting union policy, withdrawing support for strike action and firing oppositionists among the staff. The last occurred in part because the pro-social democratic part of the opposition was not keen on protecting communist staff representatives (see Chapter IV). The national leadership was able to resist the growing pressure for strike action in the 1940's by refusing to give the local financial support and relying on loyal staff representatives and key activists to discourage it (see Chapter V). Strike action was also impeded because of the reluctance of communist party activists in the local to do anything that would harm the war effort. The independent militants, led by George MacNeil, stood alone in their persistent calls for strike action (see Chapter V).

In the late 1940's the united front was broken when the official leadership of the local largely cooperated with the national union leadership regarding bargaining strategy and a renewed push to marginalize communists and other radicals within the

union (see Chapter VI). The establishment forces were already clearly in control of the local and gaining ascendancy at the expense of the opposition. By the end of the 1940's oppositional forces had lost a number of struggles around support for the coal miners and seamen's strikes, coordinated collective bargaining and the affiliation of the union to the CCF. By the early 1950's the opposition was reduced to a small, ineffective and marginalized faction. It began to revive in the late-1950's as the crisis within the Sydney industry developed. It represented a reconstitution of diverse oppositional elements which included independent militants and radicals as well as communists. The unity of these diverse elements was a precondition for the resurgence of the opposition as indicated in Chapter VII and Chapter VIII.

The reconstituted oppositional forces pushed the establishment leadership to regain losses which steel workers had suffered in previous years. Eventually they were able to take some positive action as well as being able to discredit the establishment leadership. In addition, they became more organized in their attempts to win union elections by putting forward a slate of candidates (see Chapter IX).

E) Reiterating the Importance of Intra-Union Conflict in Understanding the Rise of "Responsible" Unionism and "Industrial Democracy"

In summary, this study indicates that the state of the industry, the health of the general economy, and the role of the state do not by themselves determine the policies, strategies and actions of unions and their membership. The latter are also a product of intra-union struggles whereby union members argue and debate with one another about how to use, resist or change these external factors. The study of the

sometimes intense conflicts around issues relating to union practices, policies and strategies within the USWA indicate that they are an integral feature of unions and one of the important factors which influence the direction and pace of change within them. The education and mobilization of union members in support of divergent policies and strategies was an important aspect of the history of local 1064 and the USWA in general. Furthermore, the success or failure of either the oppositional or the establishment forces was undoubtedly affected by the larger social, political and economic environment, but also by their own level of organization and their ability to assess the potential as well as the obstacles which they faced.

Methodologically, the need for historical specificity confines the study and the generalizations to be drawn from it. Such an historical approach is nonetheless required in order to understand more fully internal union dynamics and their relationship to particular conflicts between capital and labour. The study does alert us to some of the many forms which intra-union conflicts and oppositional movements can take and the impact which larger societal conditions have on them. However, it does not provide a precise schema or explanation of these variations. Further study of these variations and the conditions under which they arise is required. Perhaps human struggles and conflict have an endless variability which ultimately defies complete analysis.

The dissertation argues for the need to address the relationship between external factors and the many manifestations of intra-union conflict. In so doing, it offers a critique of some of the more popular and established approaches to union

developments and class conflict. It argues that they have misinterpreted or ignored the kind of evidence presented here. It is in this regard, as well as in elaborating the case of one particular union, that the study makes a contribution to the study of unionism. By documenting and drawing on the experience of one local within an important industrial union, the study hopefully demonstrates that intra-union conflicts are an important aspect of union life and that they can profoundly influence the impact unions have on their members and the larger society.

While this study covers the period 1936 to 1972 it still has relevance to the present situation faced by steel workers and other trade unionists in Canada. In demonstrating the limitations of one version of "responsible" unionism and "industrial democracy" it raises questions about how each has evolved to their present state. Both served the steel workers well in some respects during times of prosperity, but the erosion of, if not direct assault on, "industrial democracy" in times of economic crisis calls into question the effectiveness of "responsible" unionism.

As "industrial democracy" continues to be assaulted by capital and the state, the limitations of "responsible" unionism and its utility for present and future struggles probably will be called into question. The questioning will not likely take the form of a theoretical critique, but instead will take the form of a debate within the union movement about the types of union strategies, policies and practices that will best serve the interests of workers. As the industrial and economic crisis continues, so also will the debate. Intra-union conflict and oppositional union movements are sure to continue as an integral aspect of union developments and class conflict.

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APPENDIX A
AN AERIAL VIEW OF THE SYDNEY STEEL PLANT
(CIRCA 1990)



APPENDIX B

**A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE STEEL-MAKING PROCESS AT SYDNEY,
PRE-1990**

Since the beginning of the twentieth century most of the steel production in Canada has been carried out in large integrated plants such as existed at Sydney prior to 1990. This type of steel-making facility required the linking of expensive and technically sophisticated machinery which operates as one plant as well as a workforce of several thousand. (The number of production workers at the Sydney plant was between approximately three thousand and five thousand at various times during the period under study). The basic raw materials necessary for steel production are coal, iron ore and limestone.

There are three basic stages of steel production. The first is the making of pig iron in the blast furnace from iron ore, limestone and coke. (Coke is produced by the treatment of coal in coke ovens whereby impurities are removed.) The second stage is the production of primary steel in the open hearth where the pig iron from the blast furnace is combined with scrap metal, limestone and various other materials. The molten steel is then poured into moulds to produce ingots which are then turned into blooms or slabs. In the final stage the primary steel is sent to rolling mills where it is "rolled" into billets, rails, wire, nails, rods, bars, plate and other products.

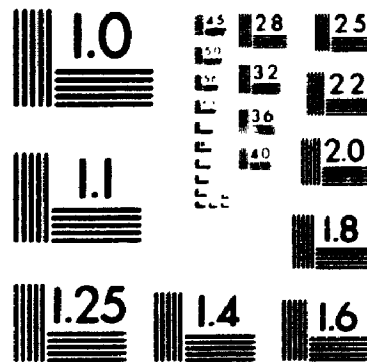
This entire process requires the linking of various departments each of which contributes to the making of the final product. In addition to the fixed departments, there is also a "General Yard" Department which acts as a reserve labour force for other departments that might need to augment the regular labour force of the other departments. Each department at Sydney usually consisted of several hundred workers some of whom were highly skilled craft workers and others who might be considered

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semi-skilled. Each department was also known to recruit and employ workers from particular racial, ethnic, or religious groups. While the dynamics between departmental work-forces and the ethnic, racial and religious groups that mainly constituted them is beyond the scope of this dissertation, it is interesting to note that as a result of these divisions each department could be viewed as a "community" in itself which was also then linked to other "communities" through the departments and the larger steel-making process.

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