

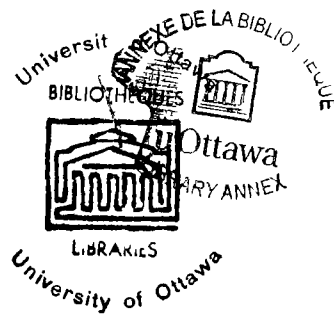
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ALPHONSE VERVILLE,  
"LIBERAL-LABOUR" MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT, 1906-1914

par: Patricia Karen Malloy

Thesis presented to the Department  
of History of the University of  
Ottawa as partial fulfillment of the  
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of Arts



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## CURRICULUM STUDIORUM

Patricia Karen Malloy was born on November 14, 1942, in Pembroke, Ontario. She received the Bachelor of Arts degree in Modern History from the University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, in 1965.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Part I: Definition of Theme

Alphonse Verville (1864-1930) was elected to the House of Commons from the Montreal riding of Maisonneuve at a federal bye-election in February, 1906. He remained in Parliament as organized labour's solitary representative until he resigned his seat at the time of the general election of 1921.

This thesis is concerned with Verville's attempts to promote labour legislation in Parliament from 1906 until the outbreak of World War I. Although he was president of the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada from September, 1904, to September, 1909, this aspect of his career will not be treated in detail. Nor will the effects on his outlook of his being a French Canadian and a Roman Catholic be discussed.

The first chapter contains an outline of the development of the Trades and Labour Congress, whose parliamentary spokesman Verville was, and its attitude toward labour participation in politics, followed by a brief

biographical account of his career to 1914. Verville believed that the most important issues on which legislation was necessary to protect labour from capital were those of immigration, union recognition, government investigation of strikes, and the eight-hour day. Each of these topics are dealt with in turn. The thesis concludes with a study of Verville's concept of the role of government, an examination of his conduct as an "independent" Labour politician, and an appraisal of his work.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine those issues which interested Canadian workers most intensely during the pre-World War I period and to discover to what extent their demands for improved conditions were met by the Liberal and Conservative governments of the era. Verville's career in politics as the workers' M.P. merits attention because it demonstrated one tactic that labour could use to publicize its grievances in a peaceable manner and on a national scale, hopefully to some effect.

## Part II: The T.L.C. and Politics

Canada began to industrialize in the late nineteenth century. The introduction of the factory system and the building of the railways caused the workers to band together in trade unions to protect themselves against exploitation and abuse on the part of capitalists. Unfortunately for the worker, up until 1872 and the passage of the Trade Union Act, such unions were treated by employers as criminal conspiracies in restraint of trade. Once they became legal bodies under the law, however, trade union membership began to grow rapidly. In 1873 the Canadian Labour Union was formed. Although intended to draw together delegates from across Canada, the C.L.U. was an essentially an Ontario based organization. The C.L.U. called for the imposition of restrictions on imported and cheap labour, union recognition, the settlement of strikes by arbitration, a shorter working day, and labour representation in Parliament. Internal disagreements over the C.L.U.'s programme and a nationwide depression caused the union to weaken and disappear by 1875. The significance of the Canadian Labour Union lay in the fact that it was the first attempt by Canadian trade unionists to secure united action to demand protective labour legislation on a national scale.

In 1886 the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada was founded. Although it contained representatives from indigenous Canadian locals and an American labour organization, the Knights of Labour, it came to be increasingly dominated by unions affiliated with the powerful American Federation of Labour. The connection between the A.F.L. and the T.L.C. was further strengthened in 1902 when the Congress decided to expel all delegates from those non-A.F.L. unions which had members in a trade in which there was already an international craft union organized. The rejected unions immediately formed themselves into the National Trades and Labour Congress, which in 1908 assumed the name of the Canadian Federation of Labour<sup>1</sup>. The T.L.C., however, went on to increase its membership: by 1914 it had 80,094 members<sup>2</sup>.

The decade before World War I was a period of great industrial expansion. Their interest in the development of a strong economy meant that the governments of the period, whether Liberal or Conservative, tended to

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1 R. H. Coats, "The Labour Movement in Canada", in Adam Shortt and Arthur G. Doughty, general editors, Canada and Its Provinces; A History of the Canadian People and Their Institutions, by One Hundred Associates. Volume IX, Part I: The Dominion: Industrial Development. Edinburgh Edition. (Printed by T. & A. Constable at the Edinburgh University Press, 1913, for the Publishers' Association of Canada Limited, Toronto), pp. 290-338.

2 Canada, Department of Labour, Labour Organization in Canada, 1914 (Ottawa, King's Printer, 1915), p. 112.

ignore abuses of the worker; at bottom they were reluctant to interfere in the economy for fear of alienating foreign investors and influential businessmen. Although the T.L.C. sought reforms annually from the government, it was really too weak to make much of an impression. Protective labour legislation was not a popular issue in an agrarian nation determined to industrialize as quickly and inexpensively as possible.

In frustration, the T.L.C. gave some consideration to establishing an independent labour party. In 1906, Labour candidate successes in Australia, New Zealand, and Great Britain, and the election of Alphonse Verville, president of the Congress, as federal representative of the Quebec riding of Maisonneuve, caused the T.L.C. to consider what part Canadian labour should play in politics <sup>3</sup>. That year at its convention in Victoria, British Columbia, the T.L.C. founded the Canadian Labour Party. But this reforming zeal soon faded away; the C.L.P. existed on paper only <sup>4</sup>. Between 1906 and 1914 the only Labour politician elected to the federal Parliament was Verville, who ran as an independent Labour candidate rather than as a representative of the C.L.P.

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<sup>3</sup> Harold A. Logan, The History of Trade-Union Organization in Canada (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1928), pp. 279-281.

<sup>4</sup> John Crispo, International Unionism; A Study in Canadian-American Relations (Toronto, McGraw-Hill, 1965), p. 243.

The reason the T.L.C. hesitated to indulge in political action on a nationwide scale was because such activity would cause dissension among a membership composed of Liberals, Conservatives, Labourites, and Socialists, all of whom would vehemently protest the Congress supporting one party in particular<sup>5</sup>. Political activity might also weaken the loyalty of the worker to the labour movement as the sole source of protection of his rights<sup>6</sup>. The T.L.C. was also reluctant to alienate those politicians presently willing to support legislative favours for labour if the workers remained politically quiescent<sup>7</sup>. As a relatively weak body in the Canadian power structure, the Congress saw its role as winning legislation from government to ameliorate the workers' lot and not as supplanting the established political parties<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Martin Robin, Radical Politics and Organized Labour in Canada, 1880-1930 (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Toronto, 1966), pp. 178, 334-335. Gad Horowitz, Canadian Labour in Politics (Number 4 in the series "Studies in the Structure of Power: Decision-Making in Canada", John Meisel, editor.) (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1968), p. 62.

<sup>6</sup> Crispo, op. cit., p. 241.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 245.

<sup>8</sup> Robin, op. cit., p. 404.

### Part III: Alphonse Verville, His Career to 1914

Alphonse Verville was born on October 28, 1864, in Côte St. Paul, near Montreal. His father was Alfred Verville, a mechanic, and his mother was Pamela Leduc of St. Hilaire.

Considering the financial circumstances of the family, Verville was fortunate that his formal education lasted as long as it did. As it was, the teaching which he received in the Roman Catholic parish school of Sault-au-Récollet ended at the age of fourteen, when he was apprenticed to the trade of plumber, gas and steamfitter. His apprenticeship finished, he emigrated to Chicago in 1882 or 1883. He lived in Chicago until 1893 with his wife, Josephine Mailhot of St. Norbert d'Arthabaska, whom he had married on New Year's Day, 1884.

Verville applied himself energetically in Chicago, becoming foreman of two large businesses in succession. During his residence in the United States he became a member of the American Federation of Labour. Soon after his return to Canada in 1893, Verville went into business for himself in Montreal. His public career as an international trades unionist began in 1898 when he became

president of the Plumbers', Gas and Steamfitters' Union, Local Number 1114 of the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada. A few years later, while business agent for this union, Verville was elected president of the Trades and Labour Council of Montreal. He did extensive travelling for the Council during his two terms of office.

In September, 1904, Verville was elected president of the Trades and Labour Congress. Although he had left the ranks of the industrial proletariat to become an employer of labour, his interest in the well-being of the workers, particularly that of the skilled tradesmen who constituted the T.L.C., was so obviously sincere and he was so competent a spokesman that he was enthusiastically returned by acclamation every year until 1909, when he modestly refused renomination on the grounds that "he did not want to monopolize the honors attached to that important position"<sup>1</sup>. He may have found combining the offices of Congress president and Labour M.P. rather fatiguing. Perhaps also he came to believe, as a result of his extensive and careful reading of economic and political histories, that the arena of the federal Parliament rather than that of the trade union convention offered the greatest opportunity for effective worker agitation. However, he still maintained his interest in the T.L.C.'s

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<sup>1</sup> Trades and Labor Congress of Canada, Canadian Congress Journal, Volume IX, Number 7, July, 1930 (Montreal, Trades and Labor Congress of Canada Publishing Company, 1930), p. 29; information extracted from the Labor World, Montreal, at the time of Verville's death on June 20, 1930.

activities. While agitating for favourable labour legislation in the House of Commons, Verville was also attending Trades and Labour Congress conventions held across Canada as a delegate of his union, the Plumbers, Gas and Steamfitters (1906-1914, with the exception of 1911), visiting the British Trades Union Congress as fraternal delegate of the T.L.C. (1913, 1914)<sup>2</sup>, travelling in the United States and even Europe (1910) to look into labour conditions and gather facts as background material for his speeches in Parliament.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Trades and Labor Congress of Canada, Report of Proceedings of the Annual Conventions, 1906-1914 (Various publishers and places of publication, 1906-1914), 1906, p. 5; 1907, p. 6; 1908, p. 5; 1909, p. 7; 1910, p. 6; 1912, p. 11; 1913, pp. 2, 10; 1914, pp. 2, 8.

<sup>3</sup> Apart from the sources mentioned in the footnotes, biographical information was also drawn from: Biographies Canadiennes-françaises (Montréal, Raphael Ouimet, 1922), p. 311.

Henry James Morgan, editor, The Canadian Men and Women of the Time; A Hand-Book of Canadian Biography of Living Characters. Second Edition. (Toronto, Briggs, 1912), p. 1128.

Dr. C. W. Parker, editor, Who's Who and Why; A Biographical Dictionary of Men and Women of Canada and Newfoundland. Volumes 6 and 7 for 1915 and 1916 bound in one volume. (Toronto, International Press, 1914), pp. 1036-1037.

Obituaries: Le Devoir, Montréal, 21 juin 1930, numéro 143, p. 3.  
The Gazette, Montreal, June 23, 1930, Number 149, p. 14.

A few months after his election as president of the T.L.C. in 1904, Verville somewhat hesitantly<sup>4</sup> entered politics for the first time. In November he contested the Quebec provincial riding of Hochelaga, a division of Montreal, as the workers' candidate. His opponent was Jérémie Décarie, a lawyer, Liberal, and son of the popular late incumbent of the seat<sup>5</sup>. The Conservatives were not active in this election<sup>6</sup>.

Verville's entrance into politics coincided with a period when industrial unrest across Canada, and especially in the province of Quebec<sup>7</sup>, was reaching a high level. Quebec strikers were protesting long hours, low wages, miserable working conditions, and refusal of employers to recognize unions, particularly of the international T.L.C. variety<sup>8</sup>. Verville wished to obtain a hearing for the workers' complaints and to promote legislative protection for their rights. He fought an enthusiastic campaign based on demands for greater worker-capitalist equality. He called for a shorter working day, protection of women and children in industry, accident insurance, free universal education, and

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<sup>4</sup> La Presse, Montréal, 14 novembre 1904, numéro 11, p. 10.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Rumilly, Histoire de la Province de Quebec, Volume XI: S. N. Parent (Montréal, Editions Bernard Valiquette /1943/), p. 194. La Presse, Montréal, 11 novembre 1904, numero 9, p. 8.

<sup>6</sup> La Presse, Montréal, 11 novembre 1904, numéro 9, p. 10.

<sup>7</sup> Rumilly, Histoire..., Volume XI: S. N. Parent, p. 132.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp. 131-132.

abolition of trusts and monopolies<sup>9</sup> . And although Verville lost the election by 2,000 votes<sup>10</sup> , his campaign so impressed the Quebec government with the growing power of the unions that a Minister of Labour was appointed to the provincial Cabinet<sup>11</sup> .

In February, 1906, a bye-election was called in the Quebec federal riding of Maisonneuve, a district of Montreal, as a result of the death of the Liberal incumbent of that seat, Raymond Préfontaine, Minister of Marine and Fisheries. The Liberals of Maisonneuve nominated L. O. Grothé as their candidate. Grothé was a wealthy cigar manufacturer, who employed three hundred men in his factory, ran a model tobacco farm, and owned several large business blocks of city property<sup>12</sup>. He had not previously been active in public life .

On February 12, the Federated Trades and Labour Council of Montreal called a meeting to nominate a candidate to oppose Grothé, whom it considered an enemy of organized labour, and Alphonse Verville was the unanimous choice of the eight hundred workers who attended<sup>13</sup> . The Conservatives also approved Verville's candidature. Desiring to see the Liberals go down to defeat in a riding that had been Liberal ever since 1896, the Conservatives also wished to

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<sup>9</sup> La Presse, Montréal, 19 novembre 1904, numéro 16, p. 24; 21 novembre 1904, numéro 17, p. 14.

<sup>10</sup> Trades and Labor Congress of Canada, Report of Proceedings of the 1906 Annual Convention, p. 7.

<sup>11</sup> Rumilly, Histoire..., Volume XII: Les écoles du Nord-Ouest (Montréal, Editions Bernard Valiquette /1944/), pp. 74-75.

<sup>12</sup> The Herald, Montreal, February 8, 1906, Number 33, p. 3; February 9, 1906, Number 34, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> La Presse, Montréal, 10 février 1906, numéro 83, p. 19; 13 février 1906, numéro 85, p. 8. The Herald, Montreal, February 13, 1906, Number 37, p. 2.

display their sympathy and support for the workers' right to obtain representation  
<sup>14</sup>  
 in Parliament .

Grothé presented himself as a prime example of the self-made man, a model for all workers striving to better themselves through diligence and hard work. Three of Grothé's most effective advocates during the campaign were Rodolphe Lemieux, Solicitor General, L. P. Brodeur, the new Minister of Marine and Fisheries, and the usually pro-labour newspaper, La Presse. Highly critical of Verville's American and Conservative "connections", they pointed out that even if elected Verville would have little influence in the House of Commons.

They also emphasized the efforts of their party to improve the lot of the workers. The Liberals had created a Department of Labour, published the Labour Gazette, paid fair wages for all work done on government contracts, imposed immigration controls on the Chinese, insisted on hygienic conditions in factories, safety on the railways, investigation of railway accidents, and provided for the peaceful arbitration and conciliation of labour disputes. For the workers of Maisonneuve to elect Verville instead of Grothé would reveal a remarkable degree of ingratitude; and it would mean an open condemnation of the labour legislation of the Laurier government, which would provide excellent campaign fodder for the Conservatives in future elections. Moreover, by electing Verville the workers of Maisonneuve would be denying themselves future access to government patronage: at the moment, the Liberals were planning to turn Montreal into a great port city by widening and deepening the channel at

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<sup>14</sup> La Presse, Montréal, 14 février 1906, numéro 86, p. 9. The Herald, Montreal, February 24, 1906, Number 47, p. 1. Rumilly, Histoire..., Volume XII: Les écoles du Nord-Ouest, pp. 124-125.

its entrance; a government defeat in Maisonneuve could delay and even defeat  
<sup>15</sup>  
 the project .

Verville denied that he had made any pact with the Conservative party  
<sup>16</sup>  
 to get elected. He was neither a Conservative pawn nor a socialist agitator .  
 He agreed that the Liberals had improved working conditions, but declared their  
 legislation inadequate. Nevertheless, if the Liberals' choice had fallen on  
 any man but Grothé, whom he considered an exploiter of labour, as a former  
 Liberal supporter and campaign worker he would not presently be contesting the  
 riding of Maisonneuve. This election was a workers' battle against an anti-  
 labour man in a constituency that was eighty percent working class all of whom,  
 Liberal or Conservative, unionized or not, would rally to Labour's side.

The threat that Verville's election could change government plans for  
 improving the port of Montreal was dismissed as nonsense, as was the statement  
 that one Labour deputy could seriously undermine Liberal voting strength in  
 the House of Commons. His trump card was that as president of the T.L.C. he

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<sup>15</sup> The Herald, Montreal, February 15, 1906, Number 39, p. 5. La Presse,  
 Montréal, 17 février 1906, numéro 89, p. 12; 19 février 1906, numéro 90, p. 4;  
 20 février 1906, numéro 91, pp. 4, 8; 21 février 1906, numéro 92, p. 4;  
 22 février 1906, numéro 93, pp. 8, 9; 23 février 1906, numéro 94, p. 7. La Patrie,  
 Montréal, 20 février 1906, numéro 302, p. 8.

<sup>16</sup> La Presse, Montréal, 16 février 1906, numéro 88, p. 10; 21 février  
 1906, numéro 92, p. 9; 22 février 1906, numéro 93, p. 10.

could speak "officially" for the workers. Because the other classes and economic interests were represented in the House of Commons and the Senate, it was only just that a group as productive and numerous as the industrial workers should have a representative in Parliament<sup>17</sup>. Despite being tagged with the epithet "socialist", the opposition of La Presse, the Catholic Church,<sup>18</sup> and the Liberal party<sup>18</sup>, Verville won the election by more than one thousand votes; one of the most heavily unionized and the largest electoral district in Canada had effectively organized its forces behind a Labour candidate<sup>19</sup>.

In late October, 1908, another general election was held. This time Verville was left unopposed by both the Liberals and the Conservatives. The Liberals refrained from contesting the riding of Maisonneuve out of gratitude for his successful mediation, at their request, in a nationwide Canadian Pacific Railway strike of 8,000 men, the continuance of which might have had serious political repercussions at election time<sup>20</sup>.

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17 La Patrie, Montréal, 13 février 1906, numéro 296, p. 8; 14 février 1906, numéro 297, p. 3; 16 février 1906, numéro 299, pp. 3, 7; 21 février 1906, numéro 303, p. 3. La Presse, Montréal, 20 février 1906, numéro 91, p. 9; 22 février 1906, numéro 93, p. 10. The Herald, Montreal, February 21, 1906, Number 44, p. 2; February 24, 1906, Number 47, p. 1.

18 Rumilly, Histoire..., Volume XII: Les écoles du Nord-Ouest, p. 125.

19 The Herald, Montreal, February 23, 1906, Number 46, p. 1; February 24, 1906, Number 47, p. 1.

20 Rumilly, Histoire..., Volume XIII: Henri Bourassa (Montréal, Editions Bernard Valiquette /1944/), pp. 170-171. See also Chapter III The Industrial Disputes Investigation Act, p. 53.

The Liberal candidate, Victor Gaudet, having withdrawn at Laurier's request, the Conservatives remaining neutral on the grounds that Labour needed a representative in Parliament, and La Presse advocating Verville's candidature as an alternative to the workers indulging in more desperate measures to obtain a hearing for their grievances, he had few worries about re-election<sup>21</sup>. Nevertheless, he did have one opponent in this election, Frédéric Villeneuve, a lawyer. Receiving no formal party endorsement, Villeneuve campaigned as an independent Liberal dedicated to promoting the interests of the workers, whom he declared dissatisfied with Verville's efforts to obtain more stringent immigration controls. He also criticized Verville's<sup>22</sup> mediation in the Canadian Pacific Railway strike.

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21 La Presse, Montréal, 15 octobre 1908, numéro 293, pp. 9, 13; 21 octobre 1908, numéro 298, p. 4.

22 La Patrie, Montréal, 16 octobre 1908, numéro 200, p. 4; 21 octobre 1908, numéro 204, p. 4. La Presse, Montréal, 16 octobre 1908, numéro 294, p. 11; 19 octobre 1908, numéro 296, p. 8; 24 octobre 1908, numéro 301, p. 23.

NOTE: Villeneuve's criticisms of Verville's conduct in Parliament and as a campaigner were countered by Victor Gaudet, who would have been the Liberal candidate in Maisonneuve if he had not been asked to withdraw by his party. Gaudet described Verville as an honest opponent, one who fought his campaigns on the basis of principles rather than personalities. La Presse, Montréal, 16 octobre 1908, numéro 294, p. 11.

Verville denied that the workers were displeased with his activity in Parliament where he had steadfastly maintained his independence of party controls. He defended his stand on immigration as a reasonable one<sup>23</sup>. He claimed that he had done everything possible for the striking C.P.R. workers, and that he approved of the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act under whose terms settlement had been reached<sup>24</sup>. In the end, Verville had very little trouble winning: his electoral majority was 4,421 votes<sup>25</sup>.

Verville's opponent in the 1911 election was Eugène W. Villeneuve, whose candidature was endorsed by the Conservatives. Villeneuve claimed to have taken the initiative in 1906 to convince the Conservatives to grant Verville their financial and moral support to defeat Grothé. They had aided Verville on the assumption that he would prove truly independent and non-partisan when it came to defending labour's interests; instead he had always voted as Laurier directed. And now Verville issued circulars describing himself as a Liberal. Villeneuve regretted that he had helped Verville to win in 1906; he now planned to rectify that mistake.

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<sup>23</sup> Verville was not against immigrants in general but he did object to paying a bonus to obtain them. See Chapter II Immigration, p. 28.

<sup>24</sup> La Presse, Montréal, 10 octobre 1908, numéro 289, p. 17; 15 octobre 1908, numéro 293, pp. 9, 13; 21 octobre 1908, numéro 298, p. 4. La Patrie, Montréal, 13 octobre 1908, numéro 197, p. 3; 21 octobre 1908, numéro 204, p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> The Canadian Parliamentary Guide, 1912, Ernest J. Chambers, editor (Ottawa, Montreal, Mortimer Company, 1913), p. 235.

Villeneuve described Verville's conduct during the course of the 1910 debate on the Naval Service Act as unpredictable and untrustworthy: although Verville had at first demanded a referendum on the subject of joining the armaments race, he later changed his mind; and having originally spoken out against the bill as a militaristic measure opposed by all labour men, he then voted for it to please the Liberals. Villeneuve also criticized Verville for supporting reciprocity. Reciprocity, he argued, would mean economic dependence on the United States and perhaps ultimate political annexation. Meanwhile it would ruin the commercial and industrial life of Canada and destroy the manufacturing district of Maisonneuve by permitting American infiltration of their markets<sup>26</sup> .

In reply, Verville, who described himself as "Liberal-Labour", claimed that everything he had done to date, including his vote on the Naval Service Act, had been approved by the workers and their unions. He denied that reciprocity would lead to annexation. He favoured it because reciprocity would lower the cost of living by forcing Canadian trusts and monopolies into

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26 Le Devoir, Montréal, 1 septembre 1911, numéro 205, p. 6; 15 septembre 1911, numéro 216, p. 6; 20 septembre 1911, numéro 220, p. 6. La Patrie, Montréal, 1 septembre 1911, numéro 161, p. 7; 18 septembre 1911, numéro 174, p. 8; 19 septembre 1911, numéro 175, p. 10; 20 septembre 1911, numéro 176, p. 2. La Presse, Montréal, 18 septembre 1911, numéro 269, p. 2; 20 septembre 1911, numéro 171, p. 10; 27 septembre 1911, numéro 277, p. 10.

competition with American business, thus breaking the formers' hold on the  
home market<sup>27</sup> . Verville fought a strenuous campaign, winning the election by  
2,205 votes<sup>28</sup> . But the party with which he had aligned himself, the Liberals  
led by Sir Wilfrid Laurier, went down to defeat and Robert Borden, leader of  
the Conservative party, became Prime Minister.

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27 La Patrie, Montréal, 11 septembre 1911, numéro 168, p. 5;  
19 septembre 1911, numéro 175, p. 10. La Presse, Montréal, 12 septembre 1911,  
numéro 264, p. 2; 13 septembre 1911, numéro 265, p. 2; 16 septembre 1911,  
numéro 268, p. 32.

28 The Canadian Parliamentary Guide, 1912, p. 235.

## CHAPTER II

### IMMIGRATION

#### I

The years of Alphonse Verville's parliamentary career were ones of massive immigration into Canada. Hundreds of thousands of newcomers were welcomed by the Laurier administration to develop the agricultural and industrial potential of a rapidly expanding but almost empty country. Under government auspices, newspapers, posters, permanent immigration offices, travelling lecturers, and exhibits advertised the economic progress of Canada to the peoples of the British Isles, the United States, and Europe .<sup>1</sup>

A bonus of five dollars a head for each immigrant, brought over to work either on a farm or as a domestic servant<sup>2</sup>, was paid to selected

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<sup>1</sup> Lloyd G. Reynolds, The British Immigrant: His Social and Economic Adjustment in Canada (Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1935), p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> After April, 1906, the bonus was granted only for those who had worked during the previous year as farmers, farm labourers, gardeners, stablemen, carters, railway section men, navvies, or miners. Prior to this time, the bonus had also been granted for skilled workers who promised to take up farming in Canada. But these men often failed at farming and drifted into the cities seeking employment. Trades and Labor Congress of Canada, Report of Proceedings of the 1906 Annual Convention, p. 48.

steamship and railway booking agents in the United Kingdom, the United States, France, Germany, Switzerland, Belgium, Holland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Austria-Hungary, and Russia<sup>3</sup>. Philanthropic organizations, such as the Salvation Army, were granted financial aid by the Canadian government to carry on immigration work<sup>4</sup>. Free or assisted passage was offered some immigrants by charitable societies, while in Canada free land grants or easy purchase terms made farming in the "last, best West" attractive<sup>5</sup>.

Unfortunately for Canada, obtaining immigrants proved an expensive project. Some European countries resented Canadian efforts to recruit their most politically stable element, the farming class, while the United States refused to encourage the emigration of productive citizens, whether farmers or industrial workers<sup>6</sup>. The British government gave little aid to emigration, helping only 21,000 people to come to Canada between 1905 and 1912 under the Unemployed Workmen Act of 1905<sup>7</sup>. Thus the financial burden involved to obtain workers fell upon the Immigration Branch of the Department of the Interior,

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<sup>3</sup> Frank Oliver, Minister of the Interior, House of Commons Debates, January 15, 1908, p. 1287.

<sup>4</sup> Trades and Labor Congress of Canada, Report of Proceedings of the 1908 Annual Convention, p. 70.

<sup>5</sup> Reynolds, op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>6</sup> Mabel F. Timlin, "Canada's Immigration Policy, 1896-1910", The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science, Volume XXVI, Number 4, November, 1960 (Toronto/1960), p. 522.

<sup>7</sup> Reynolds, op. cit., p. 47.

which spent seven million dollars to attract people to Canada in the decade  
<sup>8</sup>  
 prior to 1908 . Farmers, labourers, craftsmen, clerks, domestics - all were  
 welcome (at least during periods of prosperity). Thousands emigrated, exchanging  
<sup>9</sup>  
 moderate social and economic opportunities at home for greater ones in Canada .  
 Between July 1, 1906, and March 31, 1909, 381,241 immigrants entered the  
<sup>10</sup>  
 Dominion despite the severe recession of 1907-1908. Experienced farmers were  
 obtained from the most plentiful source available, the United States. Eastern  
 Europe supplied generous numbers of unskilled labourers, while from Great  
<sup>11</sup>  
 Britain came mechanics, artisans, and domestics .

Despite the great influx of immigrants, the Laurier government of the  
 era had a markedly unsophisticated attitude toward the type of worker the  
 Canadian industrial market required. Even the attempts of the Bureau of

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8 Ibid., p. 38.

9 Ibid., p. 10, paraphrased.

10 Between July 1, 1906, and March 31, 1909, the following groups and  
 numbers of immigrants entered Canada: farmers or farm labourers, 85,701;  
 general labourers, 108,358; mechanics, 99,687; clerks, traders, etc., 30,280;  
 miners, 9,793; female servants, 21,697; not classified, 25,725. Canada,  
 Department of the Interior, Annual Reports of the Department of the Interior,  
 1907-1909, Part II: Immigration, Sessional Paper Number 25 (Ottawa, King's  
 Printer, 1907-1909), 1907, pp. 14-17; 1908, pp. 14-17; 1909, pp. 12-15.

11 Reynolds, op. cit., pp. 46-48.

NOTE: Among the various agencies involved in immigration were: booking  
 agents of the railway and steamship companies, the Salvation Army, charitable  
 emigration societies, the British Poor Law Guardians, the British Employment  
 Agency of Canada, the Central Emigration Board, London, the Western Canada  
 Publicity Office, the North Atlantic Trading Company, the Canadian Manufacturers'  
 Association, builders' exchanges, contractors, real estate agents, land speculators.

Statistics to evaluate carefully the Canadian market in terms of employment opportunities and needed occupational skills were often unsuccessful. What immigration controls there were tended to be haphazard and uninformed by any conscious policy<sup>12</sup> .

In a survey written in 1920, W. G. Smith outlined the flaws in the early immigration legislation:

/The Immigration Act of 1906 as amended in 1907 and again in 1908/ excluded certain classes, such as idiots, insane, feeble-minded, deaf and dumb, dumb, blind or infirm unless the immigrant belonged to a family accompanying him or already in Canada, which gave security for his permanent support if admitted to Canada; persons with loathsome, contagious, or infectious disease; paupers, destitutes, professional beggars, vagrants, or who are likely to become a public charge. But the United States /Immigration Act of 1907/ debarred the entrance of polygamists, anarchists, contract labourers, while the Canadian law had no such prohibitory measures, nor did it definitely debar assisted immigrants as the United States did<sup>13</sup>.

Nor did the Canadian Immigration Act say anything concerning misrepresentation of employment opportunities or abuse of the bonus system.

Particularly resentful of these loopholes in immigration laws was the Trades and Labour Congress, spokesman for the skilled craft unions on the subject.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> W. G. Smith, A Study in Canadian Immigration (Toronto, Ryerson, 1920), p. 93.

The Congress accused the Salvation Army (one of the most active of the immigration agencies) and the Canadian government of being in league with the Manufacturers' Association. The T.L.C. insisted that the Salvation Army encouraged skilled labour to enter Canada and then permitted their employment bureaux to be used as strikebreaking agencies<sup>14</sup>. The government allowed misrepresentation and protected corrupt officials, who acted as pawns of the Manufacturers' Association<sup>15</sup>. It was also apparent that the administration was ignoring the fact that alien labour laws to prevent the importation of strikebreaking cheap contract labour were often ineffectual<sup>16</sup>. Nor did the government seem to mind Oriental labour displacing Canadian and thus provoking racial conflict in Canada<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> Trades and Labor Congress of Canada, Report of Proceedings of the 1909 Annual Convention, p. 45.

<sup>15</sup> The T.L.C. accused W. T. R. Preston, former Canadian commissioner of immigration in Great Britain and now a member of the Trade and Commerce Department in the Far East, of being in collusion with Louis Leopold, the agent of the Canadian Manufacturers' Association in Britain. Both were blamed for misrepresentation when it came to sending unwanted skilled workers to Canada. The Congress claimed that Leopold's misconduct was a direct cause of the passage by the Canadian government of the Misrepresentation to Immigrants Act of 1905, ineffectual as it proved to be. Yet Preston borrowed money from Leopold and even had him accredited as bonused immigration agent of the Allan Line Steamship Company. Ibid., 1906, pp. 9, 39-40.

<sup>16</sup> Reynolds, op. cit., pp. 36-38.

<sup>17</sup> Trades and Labor Congress of Canada, Report of Proceedings of the 1906 Annual Convention, p. 11.

Both the Salvation Army and the Manufacturers' Association were accused by the T.L.C. of misrepresenting Canadian economic conditions; the former for the sake of the bonus, the latter for the sake of obtaining cheap labour. The Salvation Army rejected the protests of the Congress. The manufacturers and industrialists also justified their position on the following grounds: Canada was a young, undeveloped country in the process of rapid industrialization; therefore overhead costs were high<sup>18</sup> and labour - whether European or Oriental - needed to be inexpensive if industry was to survive.

Verville showed a most intense interest in immigration as an issue during the period 1907-1908. In December, 1907, in the House of Commons, he attacked misrepresentation by employers. He objected to the encouragement the Manufacturers' Association was giving to the immigration of skilled labour into Canada from Britain at a time of acute industrial unemployment in this country.

Verville felt that only those immigrants who could fit into the Canadian economy without disrupting it were acceptable. He stated that the Canadian trade union movement was not against immigrants as such and even approved of farmer immigrants. But labour men combatted the importation of skilled labour on the basis of misrepresenting the employment opportunities in Canada. Such

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18 W. T. Easterbrook and Hugh G. J. Aiken, Canadian Economic History (Toronto, Macmillan, 1961), p. 403.

misrepresentation meant that five or six men applied for every position available and by such competition lowered wage rates to starvation levels<sup>19</sup>. This situation was desired neither by the Canadian workers nor the immigrants, who did not wish to inflict unjust wage and employment practices on their fellow workers. Unhappily for all concerned, the use of misrepresentation to attract workers was especially prevalent at times of labour unrest when immigrants were used to break strikes, whether they liked it or not<sup>20</sup>.

Most irritating of all, the very organization which encouraged this wasteful influx of skilled workers, the Manufacturers' Association, refused to bear any of the expense involved when these men could find no employment and sought financial aid. As Verville bitterly commented, "It is all very well to call a labour society a charitable organization, but at the same time it is no more than fair that the Manufacturers' Association should bear the burden imposed by /this/ immigration as well as we /T.L.C./ do". But this the industrialists refused to do, insisting that the more numerous the population, the better the times. Such a concept held true, Verville noted, only if the people as a whole could support themselves independently of public charity<sup>21</sup>.

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19 A. Verville, House of Commons Debates, December 17, 1907, pp. 804-805.

20 Ibid., May 9, 1906, pp. 2961-2962.

21 Ibid., December 17, 1907, pp. 805-806.

Verville continued his criticism of immigration practices in the spring of 1908. At this time the problem was the bonus system. As noted, this system involved the paying of certain government-approved agencies five dollars apiece for each immigrant brought to Canada to fill employment opportunities as either farmers or domestic servants .

Insisting once again that labour organizations were not opposed to immigration as such, he went on to state that they were most emphatically opposed to the blatant deception being indulged in by bonused agencies at the expense of both the immigrant and the Canadian people. The Dominion government confined bonus payments to farm labourers and domestic servants; but the agencies sidestepped this limitation by advising skilled labour clients to pose as either farm or domestic workers. These skilled workers agreed to this deception on the often false assumption that there would be work available in Canada for persons possessing their industrial skills.

Was the government aware that it was being duped by both immigration agencies and immigrants. If not, then it should heed his warning. But if the government knew of the situation, then the intention behind allowing it to continue must be to crush labour by glutting the labour markets of the cities with men anxious for any type of work.

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22 While Canada offered a bonus to attract immigrants, the United States imposed a head tax on them to defray the cost of inspection. James S. Woodsworth, Strangers Within Our Gates, or Coming Canadians (Toronto, The Missionary Society of the Methodist Church, 1909), p. 265.

What especially angered Verville was that this pernicious practice of misrepresentation, this "speculating in human flesh", was carried on even by charitable institutions, church societies, and in particular the Salvation Army. The original beneficent impulses of these groups had been undermined by the desire to make money. The victory of their commercial instincts over their humanitarian ones resulted in their betraying the trust and goodwill of the poorer classes who, although determined to improve their standard of living, did not wish to do so by taking employment away from fellow workmen.

Verville maintained that the bonus money paid to immigration agencies like the Salvation Army should be discontinued, now that its original purpose of attracting settlers to the unpopulated areas of the West had been fulfilled. The continuance of the bonus system encouraged agencies interested only in making so much per head to misrepresent Canadian economic conditions, thus flooding an already overcrowded labour market.

The bonus system being of no further value, Verville suggested an alternative. He declared that the best method of attracting suitable immigrants would be to allow successful settlers to return to their homelands to promote the economic advantages of life in Canada from personal experience. In this way, through the dissemination of reliable information, Canada would obtain a population capable of being economically and socially assimilated .

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23 A. Verville, House of Commons Debates, April 14, 1908, pp. 6817-6825.

Although it refused to discontinue payment of the bonus, the Laurier administration responded to the other criticisms of Verville and the T.L.C. by imposing more restrictive immigration controls. In 1907, the British government, at the insistence of Mackenzie King, Deputy Minister of Labour, had already made it an offense subject to fine or imprisonment to induce people to emigrate to Canada under false pretences<sup>24</sup>. However, as this penalty for defrauding immigrants applied only to steerage passengers and not to second-class ones also, a great deal of misrepresentation of Canadian economic conditions still persisted<sup>25</sup>.

To protect further foreign labour against abuse, the Immigration Branch of the Department of the Interior made certain that government officials, emigration societies, employers' agents, booking agents, railway and steamship companies now advised potential immigrants more realistically (and honestly) concerning employment opportunities in Canada<sup>26</sup>.

The steamship companies certainly became very wary of encouraging indiscriminate immigration when they discovered that they would have to accept the cost of transporting the rejects back home<sup>27</sup>. And no longer could the

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<sup>24</sup> Canada, Department of the Interior, Annual Report of the Department of the Interior for 1907, Part II: Immigration, p. 63.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 1911, p. 70.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 1909, pp. 64-66.

<sup>27</sup> Smith, op. cit., p. 81. This regulation came into effect in 1908.

agent of the Canadian Manufacturers' Association in England, Louis Leopold, issue circulars to the effect that fifty bricklayers were needed in Montreal when in reality two hundred and fifty were out of work. Incidentally, these same circulars had claimed that wages in Canada were so high and the cost of living so low that after ten years of laying bricks (overlooking the fact that this type of work was impossible in the winter) the average worker could return home with ten thousand dollars in savings<sup>28</sup> .

Inspection of immigrants posed another problem. Although a strict medical and civil examination was supposed to be carried out in accordance with the terms of the Immigration Act of 1906<sup>29</sup> at the port of debarkation in Canada, the inspection of immigrants tended to be superficial<sup>30</sup> . Only those who were obviously undesirable - criminal, diseased, insane, retarded,<sup>31</sup> immoral, paupers - were rejected and deported with any degree of efficiency . Borderline cases of undesirable types often slipped through, many never to find employment and thus become a drain on Canadian charity and the Canadian economy<sup>32</sup> . As the funds of social welfare agencies, such as the Salvation

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28 A. Verville, House of Commons Debates, December 17, 1907, p. 803.

29 F. Oliver, House of Commons Debates, February 5, 1908, pp. 2545-2546.

30 Trades and Labor Congress of Canada, Report of Proceedings of the 1908 Annual Convention, pp. 7-8.

31 Smith, op. cit., p. 57.

32 Woodsworth, op. cit., p. 273.

Army, were inadequate to care for large numbers of unemployed immigrants over  
<sup>33</sup>  
 long periods, many suffered extreme deprivation .

Once the Canadian government became aware of these defects in its policy, inspection of those who were apt to become public charges because of physical or mental defects became more stringent. No longer was Britain able to "dump" her destitute, incompetent, and unemployable citizens on Canada. Canadian officials in Britain were now to approve the suitability of all persons receiving aid from charitable and philanthropic societies anxious to give the destitute a new  
<sup>34</sup>  
 start . Officials also protested British judges sending men to Canada instead  
<sup>35</sup>  
 of to prison for the less serious types of misdemeanors .

All these improvements in legislation reached their climax in the laws of 1910. This legislation finally established the principle that during a period of intense pressure on Canada to accept immigrants from the overcrowded

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33 Reynolds, op. cit., p. 254. To alleviate this situation, the Canadian government in 1908 made it clear that it would attempt to place only experienced farmers and domestic servants. Any other type of worker entering the country must possess twenty-five dollars plus a ticket to his final destination in Canada. The monetary requirement would be waived in the case of those going either to definite employment or to live with relatives. Canada, Department of the Interior, Annual Report of the Department of the Interior for 1909, Part II: Immigration, pp. 63-64.

34 Ibid., pp. 62-63.

35 Ibid., 1907, p. 64.

nations of the world, "a variable screen of law and regulation" must be erected<sup>36</sup> to protect Canada from becoming a catch-all for the world's poor .

The passage of the Immigration Act of 1910 pleased Verville and the Trades and Labour Congress very much. Both appeared satisfied with the measures which the Laurier government had taken to prevent the exploitation of foreign workers and to protect the job security and standard of living of Canadian labour. It was now felt that the country was at least receiving acceptable numbers of immigrants "of a class more nearly related to the legitimate needs of Canada"<sup>37</sup> . No longer would immigration officials accept the destitute or those "likely to become a public charge"<sup>38</sup> . The government now realized that immigration had to be more intelligently regulated during an era of mass movements of people. The strengthening of immigration controls reflected a change in its attitude<sup>39</sup> from one of laissez-faire to one of effective regulation . A sound and selective immigration policy was vital to protect the welfare of the existing population<sup>40</sup> . After all, the unloading of unemployed and unsuitable industrial

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36 Timlin, op. cit., pp. 530-531.

37 Trades and Labor Congress of Canada, Report of Proceedings of the 1910 Annual Convention, pp. 40-41.

38 Ibid., p. 11.

39 Timlin, op. cit., p. 529.

40 Reynolds, op. cit., p. 289.

and agricultural workers in Canada would scarcely enable her to secure a healthy, stable, progressive, intelligent population. Unless chosen with discrimination, men who could find no employment in their native lands were not apt to prove economic assets; Canada could not sustain massive numbers of such people without her present population suffering further hardship, perhaps economic disaster <sup>41</sup> .

The T.L.C. was particularly pleased with that section of the Act which barred entry to "immigrants of any specified class, occupation, or character" considered unsuitable. This regulation was obviously designed to prevent the influx of strikebreakers during periods of industrial unrest <sup>42</sup> . The government's decision to veto the creation of an Imperial Labour Exchange was also approved by the Congress. Such an exchange, it was felt, would quickly degenerate into a tool of the Manufacturers' Association, which would use it to avoid restrictions in the new Immigration Act concerning the importation of cheap contract labour to break strikes. The British would probably use it to send their unemployed to Canada <sup>43</sup> .

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<sup>41</sup> Charlotte Whitton, The Immigration Problem for Canada, Bulletin Number 48 of the Departments of History and Political and Economic Science in Queen's University, Kingston (Kingston, Jackson Press, 1924), pp. 4, 10.

<sup>42</sup> Trades and Labor Congress of Canada, Report of Proceedings of the 1910 Annual Convention, p. 11.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 14; 1911, pp. 13, 17.

NOTE: The British did not insist on the establishment of an Imperial Labour Exchange; perhaps they realized that it could be used for Canada's benefit as well as their own. If they began to unload their unemployed on Canada, Canada would undoubtedly retaliate in kind.

The T.L.C. and Verville, although gratified with the Immigration Act of 1910, continued to protest payment of bonuses<sup>44</sup> and loopholes in the legislation<sup>45</sup> which still permitted the importing of strikebreakers<sup>46</sup> and misrepresentation . Agitating to protect the job security of Canadian workers, they resented the exploitation of foreign workers deposited on Canadian shores and utilized as cheap labour or strikebreakers by avaricious employers indifferent to the well-being of labour.

## II

Verville disapproved of unrestricted white immigration on economic grounds, but in the case of his opposition to Oriental immigration there was added an obvious element of racial antagonism. As president of the T.L.C. in 1907 he acceded to the members' request that Laurier be asked to abrogate the treaty with Japan, a treaty which permitted free movement of Canadian and Japanese nationals within the territories of each other. This agreement between

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<sup>44</sup> Trades and Labor Congress of Canada, Report of Proceedings of the 1914 Annual Convention, p. 119.

<sup>45</sup> A. Verville, House of Commons Debates, April 21, 1913, p. 8121.

<sup>46</sup> Trades and Labor Congress of Canada, Report of Proceedings of the 1914 Annual Convention, pp. 118-119.

the two countries was opposed by T.L.C. delegates from British Columbia in particular. These delegates stated that their province was being swamped by Orientals willing to accept extremely low wages and thus displacing white workers. By 1907, Asiatics constituted one-quarter of the male population of that province. And in a year of economic depression, heavy Japanese immigration and acute unemployment led to race riots<sup>47</sup> .

Laurier's reply to the Congress was that breaking the treaty with Japan would be diplomatically unwise. He had no intention of provoking an aggressive nation on the move after military victories over seemingly powerful enemies such as China and Russia. Also, terminating the arrangement would serve no really useful purpose as the troubles in British Columbia were directed against Orientals in general and not just the Japanese in particular. However, Laurier did negotiate with the Japanese government concerning immigration. The net result of these negotiations was that the Japanese themselves agreed to limit<sup>48</sup> emigration to Canada to certain classes not exceeding four hundred per year .

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<sup>47</sup> Between July 1, 1906, and March 31, 1908, 16,366 Asiatics entered Canada (Chinese, Japanese, and Hindu). 9,643 were Japanese. Almost without exception they all entered British Columbia. Canada, Department of the Interior, Annual Reports of the Department of the Interior, 1907-1908, Part II: Immigration, 1907, pp. 14-17; 1908, pp. 14-17.

<sup>48</sup> Timlin, op. cit., pp. 523-528. Trades and Labor Congress of Canada, Report of Proceedings of the 1907 Annual Convention, pp. 78-79.

At the same time, the Canadian government passed a "continuous voyage" regulation in 1908. Prior to this legislation, immigration officials might have found certain persons unacceptable as potential Canadian citizens for physical, intellectual, or moral reasons; but having returned these deportees to the ports from which they had sailed, it had often been discovered that because they had not been citizens of that country they had been refused re-entry. Canada had then been forced to accept responsibility for them <sup>49</sup>. The new amendment was to apply to all immigrants, whatever their qualifications. If they did not come to Canada on a through ticket purchased in their place of birth or citizenship, they would be deported <sup>50</sup>. This restriction effectively barred many Asiatics, few of whom could afford the price of a through ticket <sup>51</sup>. By 1910, exclusion regulations applied to all Asiatics who possessed less than two hundred dollars and a ticket to their destination in Canada. Special arrangements existed in the case of the Chinese and the Japanese. The Chinese had to pay a five hundred dollar head tax; the Japanese, whose numbers had previously been restricted, had to possess twenty-five dollars plus a passport <sup>52</sup>. These were the controls which

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<sup>49</sup> W. Laurier, House of Commons Debates, April 8, 1908, pp. 6432-6433.

<sup>50</sup> F. Oliver, House of Commons Debates, April 8, 1908, p. 6434.

<sup>51</sup> Timlin, op. cit., p. 529.

<sup>52</sup> Canada, Department of the Interior, Annual Report of the Department of the Interior for 1910, Part II: Immigration, p. 70.

the Liberal government of Wilfrid Laurier, wishing to appear progressive and enlightened, but anxious to avoid racial tension, imposed on coloured immigration<sup>53</sup> .

The next detailed comment by Verville on Oriental immigration came in the early spring of 1913, during the debate on Prime Minister Robert Borden's Naval Service Bill. Verville's outspoken resistance to donating thirty-five million dollars to Britain to strengthen her fleet was based on the belief, among others, that if Canada ever needed protection against invasion it would not be on the Atlantic but on the Pacific. Protection would be required against the newly established and powerful Chinese republic, which was now sending wave upon wave of unassimilable Chinese to Canada to enter into business and commercial operations alongside the Japanese in competition with native-born and white Canadians<sup>54</sup> .

This socio-economic excuse for combatting coloured immigration became a purely economic one a year later. In 1914 he blamed a two hundred percent increase in accidents in the Cumberland mines of the Canadian Collieries Company on Vancouver Island on the use of cheap, inexperienced, strikebreaking Oriental miners in violation of provincial law<sup>55</sup> .

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53 Timlin, op. cit., pp. 520, 530.

54 A. Verville, House of Commons Debates, March 8, 1913, p. 5046; March 14, 1913, pp. 5754-5757.

55 Ibid., February 10, 1914, p. 651.

In protesting the immigration of Asiatics, Verville was echoing, albeit mildly, the constant demands of the Trades and Labour Congress for an all-white Canada, free of inexpensive Asiatic labour. As Verville and the Congress knew well, the exploitation of Orientals by mining magnates and industrialists deprived Canadian workers of employment and could lead to the outbreak of racial bitterness and violence. But, despite the fact that they claimed their protests against Oriental immigration were based on economic reasoning, there were obvious elements of racism, of fear of being swamped by coloured peoples.

### III

Between 1906 and 1910 regulations governing the influx of peoples into Canada became definitely selective and restrictive. Urgently as Canada needed workers at this time, she still refused to accept applicants unless they could fit into the Canadian environment and economy. Some of the impetus behind strengthening and clarifying immigration laws came from men such as Verville and the organization to which he belonged, the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada.

Yet Verville had concentrated his attention on the immigration issue only during a period of economic recession, 1907-1908. Apart from scattered objections after 1908, the whole problem, despite its extremely significant

economic, political, and social ramifications was rarely touched upon - and never at length. One explanation of his unconcern at a time when there was a great flood of immigrants is that prosperity returned, bringing with it economic opportunity for native-born and newcomer alike. Also, working relations between new Canadians and long-established ones improved, once it was discovered that the immigrants were as anxious as the T.L.C. to win a decent standard of living and humane working conditions<sup>56</sup> .

The question which must now be answered is: how realistic was Verville's understanding of the very complicated problem of international and multi-racial migration?

Verville's protests and suggestions in the House of Commons reflected the rather narrow, group interests of skilled, organized labour as represented by the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada, whose president he was at this time. The Congress wanted to turn Canada into an almost forbidden land as far as immigration was concerned, so that a small population could enjoy the profits of a rapidly expanding economy<sup>57</sup> . Sympathetic as the T.L.C. and Verville might profess themselves toward the natural desire of peoples to improve their standard of living, their defense of immigration controls was

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<sup>56</sup> Woodsworth, op. cit., p. 285. Charles Lipton, The Trade Union Movement of Canada, 1827-1959 (Montreal, Canadian Social Publications, 1967/), pp. 124-126.

<sup>57</sup> Trades and Labor Congress of Canada, Report of Proceedings of the 1906 Annual Convention, p. 11.

based on the desire to protect the job security of Congress members in particular and Canadians in general. However justifiable this policy, it is unfortunate that the T.L.C. appeared so unwilling to share the great resources and abundant opportunities of Canada with more oppressed and deprived nations.

The Laurier government, faced with the conflicting demands of the T.L.C. for controls and the Manufacturers' Association for an open door policy, decided to compromise. The Immigration Act of 1910, while making clear Canada's right to pick and choose the quality and quantity of citizens she wanted, also revealed a desire to protect the immigrant against abuse and exploitation when it came to such matters as misrepresentation of employment opportunities, treatment on the journey over, and reception in Canada. In short, it was the government of the era which revealed the most sympathy toward the immigrant and the most intelligent grasp of his problems .

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58 Smith, op. cit., pp. 92-113.

## CHAPTER III

### THE INDUSTRIAL DISPUTES INVESTIGATION ACT

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, industrial conflict in Canada became more and more frequent, violent, and costly. Verville's experience of labour disputes as a workingman, T.L.C. president, and Labour M.P. convinced him that this type of economically destructive activity had to be checked if Canada's industrial development were not to be permanently retarded. He therefore urged the Dominion government to assert its prerogative to secure industrial peace. Under the "peace, order and good government" clause of the British North America Act, the federal Parliament has the power to pass legislation governing the conduct of strikes in all industries of a public-<sup>1</sup> utility character, such as communications, transportation, and coal mines.

The Conciliation Act of 1900 was the first in a series of measures designed to prevent strikes and lockouts. This Act, which was modelled on a British statute, established a Department of Labour whose "good offices /.../ should be lent, on the request by employer or employee or on the department's initiative, for the settlement of any labour dispute". Voluntary arbitration

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<sup>1</sup> Coats, op. cit., pp. 338, 343.

came into effect if both parties agreed to accept as binding the suggested terms  
<sup>2</sup>  
of settlement .

In 1901 the Canadian Pacific Railway trackmen went on strike. The  
widespread dislocation of business brought about by this transportation tie-up  
prompted the drafting of the Railway Labour Disputes Act of 1903 .<sup>3</sup>

/The Act/ provided for the appointment of a tripartite conciliation  
board in disputes between railway companies and their employees at the  
request of either party or of the municipality concerned or on the  
/Minister of Labour's/ own initiative. Failing a settlement, a dispute  
was to be referred to an arbitration board but its report was not  
binding<sup>4</sup>.

Only one dispute had been referred for settlement under the terms of this Act  
when in 1906 it was merged with the Conciliation Act and entitled the Conciliation  
and Labour Act .<sup>5</sup>

Despite such legislation, industrial conflict was recurrent and costly,  
its burdens falling on the ordinary workingman and the trade unions. Employers,  
fearful of the growing power of these unions, whether national in origin or

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2 Ibid., pp. 341-342.

3 Ibid., p. 342.

4 Edith Lorentsen and Evelyn Woolner, "Fifty Years of Labour Legislation  
in Canada", The Labour Gazette, Fiftieth Anniversary Edition, Volume L, Number 9,  
September, 1950 (Ottawa, King's Printer, 1950), pp. 1417-1418.

5 Ibid., p. 1418, paraphrased.

internationally affiliated, sought to weaken them by refusing to recognize them, forbidding their employees to join them, declining to bargain with them, and crushing strikes using every means at their disposal from court injunctions to armed guards, police, the militia, blacklists, dismissals, labour spies, detectives, immigrant strikebreakers<sup>6</sup> .

One example of such violent rejection of unionization was provided by the MacLaren Lumber Company at Buckingham, Quebec. On September 12, 1906, four hundred men went on strike demanding higher pay. The strike lasted almost a month. During that time the Company replaced the strikers with new men and the mills began to operate as usual. However, the Company refused to allow either the Quebec government or the federal Department of Labour to mediate on the grounds that it did not choose to deal with the international union which represented the men. On October 8 there was a serious riot which resulted in the death of two strikers and the injury of several others. One detective (or special guard) was shot and three others were wounded. The MacLaren Company petitioned for military protection and immediately received it in the form of one hundred militiamen from Ottawa. The militia was later replaced<sup>7</sup> by regular troops who remained in Buckingham until order was restored .

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6 Lipton, op. cit., pp. 108, 111-114.

7 J. Castell Hopkins, The Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs, 1906 (Toronto, The Annual Review Publishing Company, 1907), p. 288.

The most publicized strike of 1906, however, was a coal strike which broke out at Lethbridge in southern Alberta. The trouble erupted in March but was not terminated until late November. As the dispute continued, and as the Deputy Minister of Labour, Mackenzie King, met with the parties concerned, hardship on the prairies increased drastically as the cold Canadian winter set in. Ottawa was flooded with telegrams and letters demanding an end to a strike which had originally begun over such vital issues as union recognition, wages, and hours, and had degenerated into a squabble over "such questions as to whether any meeting whatever between the parties would imply a recognition of the union"<sup>8</sup> .

The Alberta strike forced the Laurier administration to recognize the fact that something had to be done to avoid such crises in the future. Prime Minister Laurier instructed Mackenzie King to draft a law designed to prevent economically destructive and potentially violent strikes<sup>9</sup> ; industrial peace was absolutely necessary to ensure Canada's prosperity.

During the Christmas vacation of 1906, King drew up the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act<sup>10</sup> . He adopted ideas for the legislation, "including elements of compulsion", from provincial conciliation laws and particularly

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<sup>8</sup> R. MacGregor Dawson, William Lyon Mackenzie King; A Political Biography, 1874-1923 (/Toronto/ University of Toronto Press, 1958), pp. 133-134.

<sup>9</sup> H. S. Ferns and B. Ostry, The Age of Mackenzie King; The Rise of the Leader (London, Heinemann; Toronto, British Book Service (Canada), 1955), p. 70.

<sup>10</sup> The I.D.I. Act was also known as the Lemieux Act after the Minister of Labour at the time, Rodolphe Lemieux.

from an early New South Wales, Australia, statute<sup>11</sup>. He also borrowed parts of the Act from conciliation systems in effect in New Zealand and some states of the United States<sup>12</sup>.

Designed to "Aid in the Prevention and Settlement of Strikes and Lockouts in Coal Mines and Industries connected with Public Utilities", the I.D.I. Act was intended to protect the interests of the general public "through preventing any precipitate dislocation in the operations of industries" such as coal mines, transportation, street railways, the telegraph and telephone<sup>13</sup>. The onus for instituting proceedings under the Act lay not with the government but with the individual employers or employees of any industry (whether a public utility or not) who had grievances<sup>14</sup>. "No/ strike or lockout could be legally declared in a public utility or mine until the differences which had arisen had first been referred to a three-man board of conciliation representing the employer, the men, and the public". The board was empowered to subpoena witnesses, place them under oath, and examine private documents<sup>15</sup>. "Employers and employees must give at least thirty days' notice of an intended change affecting the

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<sup>11</sup> Paul A. Samuelson and Anthony Scott, Economics; An Introductory Analysis, Second Canadian Edition (Toronto, McGraw-Hill, 1968), p. 154.

<sup>12</sup> Ferns and Ostry, op. cit., p. 70.

<sup>13</sup> Harold A. Logan, The History of Trade-Union Organization in Canada (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1928), pp. 217-218, quoted and paraphrased.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., pp. 218-219.

<sup>15</sup> Dawson, W. L. M. King, p. 136.

conditions of employment with respect to wages and hours, and, pending the proceedings before a board, the relations of the parties to the dispute should remain unchanged". If a work-stoppage occurred while the investigation was in progress, those responsible for the strike or lockout would be fined .

/The board/ was to achieve a settlement by conciliation if possible, but if this failed, its report would give in detail the questions at issue and the basic facts, and indicate a possible settlement. If members disagreed, majority and minority reports were to be submitted. The two parties to the dispute were under no legal obligation whatever to accept the recommendation, and they were thenceforward free to take any action they might see fit. The right to strike or lock out, in short, remained unimpaired except for the necessity of delaying action while the inquiry was being held and a report prepared<sup>16</sup>.

Voluntary arbitration was also provided for under the Act. Section 62 stated that "if the parties agreed to be bound by the award or recommendation of a board, then such an award or recommendation might be made a rule of a court of record and be treated as an award of a court of arbitration"<sup>17</sup> .

Compulsory arbitration was rejected on the grounds that forced settlements resulted in resentment, which would only cause disagreement to erupt again .<sup>18</sup>

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16 Logan, op. cit., p. 218.

17 Dawson, W. L. M. King, p. 136.

18 Logan, op. cit., pp. 218-219.

19 Dawson, W. L. M. King, p. 143.

The methods of publicity, discussion, and compromise advocated by the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act would compel management and labour to produce facts and arguments to justify their position before the public and so force them to reach a settlement on a reasonable basis<sup>20</sup>. The argument in favour of publicity and investigation to terminate industrial disputes was best expressed by Mackenzie King more than a decade later when he wrote:

Investigation is a letting in of light. It does not attempt to award punishments or to affix blame; it simply aims at disclosing facts /.../ Its use is a high tribute to human nature, for it assumes that collective opinion will approve the right, and condemn the wrong /.../ The statutory right to investigate disputes, which some public boards enjoy, has been found sufficient to influence parties to industrial differences to settle their controversies both voluntarily and speedily<sup>21</sup>.

The I.D.I. Act came in for much comment in the House of Commons prior to becoming law on March 22, 1907. Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier agreed with King when it came to the value of investigation and publicity. Pronouncing the bill "a very satisfactory measure", Laurier maintained that exposing the arguments of both sides to the public would result in fair and peaceful negotiations; only as a last resort and with the support of public opinion<sup>22</sup> would either side turn to strikes or lockouts. Moreover, labour men had

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20 Ibid., pp. 143-144.

21 W. L. Mackenzie King, Industry and Humanity; A Study in the Principles Underlying Industrial Reconstruction (Toronto, Thomas Allen; Boston and New York, Houghton Mifflin, 1918), pp. 210-211.

22 W. Laurier, House of Commons Debates, December 17, 1906, pp. 1042-1043.

no need to fear that this legislation interfered with their right to strike "which is a powerful and sometimes the only weapon /the workers/ have against the possible tyranny of employers"<sup>23</sup> .

The Conservative Leader of the Opposition, Robert Borden, conscious of the suffering caused by the Alberta strike, advocated legislation such as the I.D.I. Act to promote the orderly prevention and settlement of strikes. He was appalled by the ineffectiveness of government action in Alberta and by the violence and bloodshed of the Buckingham strike which had preceded it. Borden was also fearful that disputes involving public utilities, mines, and railways could paralyze the economic life of Canada; something had to be done to bring order out of the growing chaos of the nation's industrial life<sup>24</sup> . The number of strikes and lockouts during the preceding five years had been outrageous; they had also been very costly, for more and more frequently the militia had been called out to keep order. The expense was borne, not by the municipalities and businesses in whose defense the militia had been used, but by the federal government. Any measure which would reduce the number of strikes would be welcomed by Borden and the Conservatives as a less expensive method of keeping

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<sup>23</sup> Railway workers in particular were wary of approving legislation which seemed to undermine the right to strike at the most opportune moment. Ibid., February 19, 1907, pp. 3298-3300.

<sup>24</sup> R. Borden, House of Commons Debates, November 23, 1906, pp. 32-33; December 10, 1906, pp. 780-781; January 9, 1907, p. 1150; February 14, 1907, pp. 3041-3042.

industrial peace<sup>25</sup> . As the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act seemed to offer a solution to these difficulties, Borden pledged his party's support to making the measure a fair and effective one<sup>26</sup> .

Rodolphe Lemieux, Minister of Labour, welcomed the support of Borden and the Conservatives. He appealed to both sides of the House to assist him in putting into effect a measure designed to make peaceful labour relations possible. Organized labour now faced organized capital when disputes broke out. The growing power of each meant that any antagonism between the two could be extremely detrimental to the welfare of the whole community. Government had to intervene to protect the rights of society against the selfish demands of employers and employees. The I.D.I. Act was designed to bring about industrial peace and fair dealing. The bill was not a radical measure, but an advanced one based on enlightened labour legislation in other countries and on statistics and information collected by the Department of Labour. For these reasons Lemieux rejected the suggestion of Borden that the bill be submitted to a committee of inquiry for further study and investigation. After all, the merits of the Act had already been generally acknowledged by those to whom Lemieux had distributed it for examination - Members of Parliament, the general public, influential newspapers in Canada, Great Britain, and the United States, and labour organizations such as the Trades and Labour Congress<sup>27</sup> .

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25 Ferns and Ostry, op. cit., p. 74.

26 R. Borden, House of Commons Debates, February 14, 1907, p. 3045.

27 R. Lemieux, House of Commons Debates, February 14, 1907, pp. 3002-3007.

Verville's initial reaction to the I.D.I. Act was favourable. He believed the bill to be in the best interests of the nation as a whole and welcomed the measure as a public recognition of labour's problems by Parliament. The bill was a step toward friendship between capital and labour for it would aid in preventing those strikes which neither side really won, but in which the employer risked bankruptcy, the workers suffered starvation. It would also force employers to recognize workers as equals and cease dealing with them on a master-slave basis. Such an attitude only exacerbated tension and made peaceful conciliation impossible; the threat of a strike had become the only effective weapon labour possessed to force some employers to heed their demands.

He believed that organized labour would welcome laws which aided in publicizing the unjust treatment of workers at the hands of employers. Whenever a strike or lockout occurred, both sides immediately tried to get the power of public opinion to support their stand. The encouragement of publicity involving labour disputes would certainly not benefit the employers, whose unwillingness to arbitrate, refusal to pay fair wages, and tendency to send to other countries for strikebreakers would hardly endear them to the general public. He was convinced that the sympathy of the public would always swing to the side of a workers' organization such as the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada, which had nothing to fear concerning any publicity surrounding its policies and practices.

Verville welcomed the I.D.I. Act as a beneficial measure which would do much, if intelligently used, to eliminate the economic misery wrought by

strikes and lockouts. He favoured compulsory investigation over compulsory arbitration, which was proving unsuccessful in New Zealand, as neither Canadian employers nor Canadian workers were ready for such radical, coercive legislation. Compulsory arbitration under government auspices would seriously weaken the bargaining position of employers and destroy labour's right to strike.

Although not in favour of every clause in the bill, Verville did approve the underlying principle of a measure which sought better relations between labour and capital. Any flaws in the Act could be amended at succeeding sessions  
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of Parliament .

The T.L.C., too, showed great interest in the bill. At the convention of 1907, after a three-hour debate, the membership voted eighty-one to nineteen in  
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favour of the measure . Undoubtedly some delegates realized that the I.D.I. Act weakened their use of the strike as a tactical threat, a fact which Samuel Gompers, president of the American Federation of Labour, unkindly pointed out immediately upon examining the Act. He called the leaders of the T.L.C. fools  
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to have abdicated the right to call a strike at the most effective moment . Yet the majority of the Congress believed that its terms meant recognition of  
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union rights to bargain collectively with employers ; but unfortunately this

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28 A. Verville, House of Commons Debates, January 9, 1907, pp. 1172-1174; February 14, 1907, pp. 3072-3076; March 19, 1907, p. 4997.

29 Logan, op. cit., p. 219.

30 Ferns and Ostry, op. cit., p. 75.

31 Ibid., p. 72.

right was merely implied and not made definite <sup>32</sup> . Another reason why many trade unionists supported the Act was because it seemed to provide a way of preventing long and costly strikes for which the worker bore the brunt of the expense <sup>33</sup> .

Canadian manufacturers regarded the Act as an essentially conservative measure which could be used to undermine the energy of those militant sections of the labour movement who believed in strike action and hard bargaining. Fearful of the more radical unionists who advocated industrial unionism (organization of the least to the highest skilled in an industry) and sympathetic strikes across the nation in the name of worker solidarity, Canadian employers viewed the I.D.I. Act as a device to clamp down on labour's belligerency <sup>34</sup> .

As time passed, it became obvious to the workers that the Act was not particularly pro-labour either in its application or its consequences. During the Grand Trunk Railway strike of 1907, the workers of the Montreal Pointe-St. Charles shops (now called the C.P.R. shops) wanted to strike in sympathy with fellow workers in the Ontario shops. But this would have meant violating the I.D.I. Act, so they did not do it. Thus the Act prevented effective action to help the Ontario strikers <sup>35</sup> .

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32 Samuelson and Scott, op. cit., p. 154.

33 Lipton, op. cit., p. 115.

34 Ferns and Ostry, op. cit., p. 68. Lipton, op. cit., pp. 104-105, 115.

35 Lipton, op. cit., p. 115.

Then came the Canadian Pacific Railway shopmen's strike of 1908 over the company's refusal to recognize a union of mechanics and attempts to lower established rates of pay<sup>36</sup>. The men applied for an arbitration board under the I.D.I. Act, but refused to accept the settlement it offered and 8,000 walked off work along the line<sup>37</sup>. At this point, Lemieux approached Verville and suggested that he use his good offices as a trusted and admired labour leader to convince the workers to reconsider their stand<sup>38</sup>. To establish better labour-management relations and for the sake of the strikers' job security, for whom the C.P.R. was beginning to hire American and British replacements<sup>39</sup>, Verville persuaded the men to accept the findings of the arbitration board and they returned to work after two months on strike. The I.D.I. Act which had almost failed as an instrument of conciliation had been salvaged<sup>40</sup>.

The I.D.I. Act, however, suffered its greatest loss of prestige as a result of the Grand Trunk Railway strike of 1910. The settlement reached under the terms of the Act did not guarantee re-employment of the strikers

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36 Lipton, op. cit., p. 105.

37 La Patrie, Montréal, 5 octobre 1908, numéro 190, p. 4; 6 octobre 1908, numéro 191, p. 1.

38 Rumilly, Histoire..., Volume XIII: Henri Bourassa, p. 171.

39 La Patrie, Montréal, 6 octobre 1908, numéro 191, p. 1.

40 Rumilly, Histoire..., Volume XIII: Henri Bourassa, p. 171.

nor prevent cancellation of their pension rights<sup>41</sup>. Moreover, as Mackenzie King, Minister of Labour (since 1909) and government mediator in the dispute admitted to Laurier:

/O/ur Industrial Disputes Investigation Act, by requiring men to submit their differences to a Board before going on strike meant a tremendous handicap to the men and a no less equal advantage to the company. But for this Act the other railway brotherhoods might have struck instantly in sympathy; some of them would probably have done so and brought the company instantly to its knees<sup>42</sup>.

Asked to approve King's conduct of this strike, Verville remained silent<sup>43</sup>.

By 1911, T.L.C. dissatisfaction with the Act was so acute that a resolution demanding repeal was defeated by only five votes<sup>44</sup>. In 1912, the Congress voted unanimously in favour of repeal of the law. Attending the convention as a delegate<sup>45</sup>, Verville, too, approved the following special resolution:

While this Congress still believes in the principle of investigation and conciliation and while recognizing that benefits have accrued at times to various bodies of workmen under the operation of the Lemieux

<sup>41</sup> Ferns and Ostry, op. cit., p. 125.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., pp. 112-113, King to Laurier, a letter of August 4, 1910, two days after the strike had ended.

<sup>43</sup> W. L. M. King Papers, Correspondence, Primary Series, Volume 19, Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa, King to Verville, a letter of August 14, 1911; Verville to King, a letter of August 30, 1911.

<sup>44</sup> Lipton, op. cit., p. 115.

<sup>45</sup> Trades and Labor Congress of Canada, Report of Proceedings of the 1912 Annual Convention, p. 11.

Act, yet in view of decisions and rulings and delays of the Department of Labor in connection with the administration of the Act, and in consequence of judicial decisions /which severely restricted worker protest activity during strikes/:-Be it resolved, that this Congress ask for the repeal of the Act<sup>46</sup>.

The members also warned the British Labour party against approving any legislation being considered in Britain along the lines of the I.D.I. Act. Such legislation would serve the employers' interests by weakening the workers' "most powerful weapon", the right to strike "when they please"<sup>47</sup>. Obviously certain sections of the Canadian labour movement were seeking to reassert the right to strike as an effective tactical weapon capable of inflicting great financial loss on employers. Although government mediation under the terms of the Act forced management to consider carefully any punitive action it might contemplate taking against labour, it also seriously weakened the workers' bargaining position to the point that industrial peace was being preserved at the expense of the men.

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE EIGHT-HOUR DAY

#### I

The industrialization of Canada brought economic exploitation in its wake; a demand arose for decent working conditions for those who were employed on the railways and in the mines, mills, and factories of the nation. One of the most insistent was that of the workingman for government regulation of hours of labour that he might have more time for rest, relaxation, and self-improvement.

Attempts to bring about a reduction of hours began in Canada in the mid-nineteenth century. Canadian workers tended to follow the lead of British and American labour in this matter: when collective bargaining failed, the strike tactic was used. From the 1860's until the First World War, one strike after another was called to protest the long working day. These strikes were supported by members of the T.L.C. skilled craft unions, railway workers, and coal miners.<sup>1</sup> Some of these strikes were successful, others were not .

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<sup>1</sup> Logan, op. cit., pp. 30-35, 78, 258-259.

As early as 1884-1885, Ontario and Quebec had passed Factory Acts controlling women and children's labour: boys under fourteen years of age and girls under eighteen could not be employed more than ten hours a day and sixty hours a week. But there were no legal regulations governing working hours for men. Hours, which ranged from nine to twelve per day, were usually determined at the employers's discretion alone .<sup>2</sup>

Employers were adamant in their opposition to granting shorter hours. Much as they desired a healthy, rested, efficient staff, they knew the supply of labour in Canada was limited. Why else was the government spending millions of dollars to encourage immigration? Although competing with manufacturers in the United States for workers, Canadian employers felt that as overhead costs in Canada were so high, long hours were a necessity to offset the initial expense of becoming established. Moreover, shorter hours would force the manufacturers to charge higher prices, thus forcing up the cost of living; lowering hours was an undesirable and impractical innovation .<sup>3</sup>

As far as government action was concerned, here and there, in individual industries (usually mines), provincial legislation establishing an eight-hour day came into effect .<sup>4</sup> But these agreements were not enough, only a limited

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<sup>2</sup> Lorentsen and Woolner, op. cit., p. 1415.

<sup>3</sup> Canada, Parliament, House of Commons, Special committee on bill number 21 "An act respecting hours of labour on public works", Proceedings of the Special committee on bill number 21 "An act respecting hours of labour on public works" comprising reports, evidence and correspondence, December 9, 1909—May 3, 1910 (Ottawa, King's Printer, 1910), Index to Communications: Boards of Trade, p. 697; Manufacturers, pp. 699-707.

<sup>4</sup> R. Lemieux, House of Commons Debates, May 7, 1909, p. 5938.

number of men benefitting from them. The T.L.C. was unhappy about this state of affairs. What the Congress desired was comprehensive legislation on the subject covering the entire nation and giving all workers "a legal working day of eight hours and six days to a week"<sup>5</sup> .

Unfortunately, the Trades and Labour Congress was not in a favourable position to win this reform. In 1906, Congress membership was only 27,676<sup>6</sup> in a country of 6,097,000 people<sup>7</sup> . Strike action based on such weak power was not effective when it came to convincing employers to grant shorter hours. The Congress therefore looked to government legislation to rectify the situation. Although there was no hope that the Dominion government would force the eight-hour day on private industry (whose hours of labour fell under provincial jurisdiction<sup>8</sup> ), Parliament might be persuaded to insist on the eight-hour day in its own public works programme. To support its demands for legislation, the T.L.C. could point to the fact that by 1909 two-thirds of the states as well as the federal government of the United States<sup>9</sup> enforced an eight-hour day on public works .

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5 Logan, op. cit., p. 189.

6 Canada, Department of Labour, Labour Organization in Canada, 1911, p. 112.

7 M. C. Urquhart and K. A. Buckley, Historical Statistics of Canada (Cambridge: at the University Press; Toronto, Macmillan, 1965), p. 14.

8 Logan, op. cit., p. 258.

9 Trades and Labor Congress of Canada, Report of Proceedings of the 1909 Annual Convention, p. 76.

As one who had once worked long hours as an employee at his trade of plumber and steamfitter, Verville resented the ambivalent attitude of the government concerning hours of labour legislation. To promote reform on this matter, he introduced a bill to the House of Commons on December 11, 1906, "respecting hours of labour on public works"<sup>10</sup>. The measure received little attention in the House, being read once and then ignored. During the 1906-1907 session the bill remained stranded on the Order Paper of Parliament's business. In February, 1908, Verville reintroduced his eight-hour bill. It was given a first reading<sup>11</sup>, and again became stranded on the Order Paper<sup>12</sup>.

Verville's unsuccessful efforts to obtain legislation shortening hours of labour were observed closely by the Trades and Labour Congress, whose president he was at this time. The executive officers of the Halifax convention of September, 1908, expressed their support of Verville and their irritation with parliamentary indifference to an issue which should have been given preferential treatment as a non-partisan measure in a statement which castigated those who feared "the loss of material advantages gained by legislative privileges". The government was called upon to legislate in the

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10 A. Verville, House of Commons Debates, December 11, 1906, p. 803.

11 Ibid., February 14, 1908, p. 3157.

12 Ibid., May 7, 1909, p. 5940.

interests of those whose economic weakness forced them to submit to exploitation by employers so powerful that even strike threats often left them unmoved<sup>13</sup> .

Some months after this outburst on the part of the T.L.C. executive, Rodolphe Lemieux, Minister of Labour, used his influence as a Cabinet minister to obtain the Speaker's permission for Verville to make a special speech in the House of Commons on the subject of hours of labour legislation. Lemieux claimed that he would have obtained Verville a hearing on this matter much sooner, but recurring family illness had kept him away from the House<sup>14</sup> . This sudden sympathy for labour legislation may also have been due to the fact that during the preceding summer Verville had done Lemieux a favour by successfully mediating in a strike of 8,000 Canadian Pacific Railway workers<sup>15</sup> .

Verville made the best of this unexpected opportunity to discuss the principles underlying a bill which would otherwise have been ignored throughout the 1909 session, stranded as it still was on the Order Paper of the House<sup>16</sup> . He set forth his reasons for promoting such legislation in a vigorous speech which caught the attention of the House of Commons and evoked much spirited debate concerning the extent of the bill's applicability and its constitutionality.

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<sup>13</sup> Trades and Labor Congress of Canada, Report of Proceedings of the 1908 Annual Convention, pp. 11-12.

<sup>14</sup> R. Lemieux, House of Commons Debates, May 7, 1909, pp. 5939-5940.

<sup>15</sup> See Chapter III The Industrial Disputes Investigation Act, p. 53.

<sup>16</sup> A. Verville, House of Commons Debates, May 7, 1909, p. 5940.

Verville regarded his efforts as part of the world humanitarian movement to reduce hours of work. It was now time that someone gave the welfare of the Canadian workingman some attention. Reforms which had been won over past years either through peaceful collective bargaining or through violent, economically destructive strikes must now be extended to the many by means of legislative enactment. He set about disproving the industrialists' arguments that shorter hours would mean a lowering of production, fewer sales, financial loss, and ultimately lower wages to employees. To prove his case, he turned to information and statistics furnished by those who had experimented with the eight-hour day in the United States, Great Britain, Germany, and Australia. Using as a prime example the experience of the Australian Steam Ship Company, he showed how the iron trades in this company's works in 1858 received an eight-hour day in return for consenting to a proportional reduction in their wages. After a year, the company discovered that it was saving so much in overhead costs (such as expenditures on gas and oil) and that it was benefitting so greatly from the more efficient work of a rested, healthier staff that it went back to paying the men at the old rate. This was done in spite of competition from companies which clung to long workdays of nine to eleven hours. Shorter hours may have meant a production loss in certain industries of five to eight percent,

but it would be offset in time by technological improvements and by the more efficient work of prompt, alert, less accident-prone men <sup>17</sup> .

The willingness of the Australian workers to accept lower wages for the sake of fewer hours proved, he argued, how desperately the workingman treasured time to relax. After all, workers were not machines. Few could bear the strains imposed by the present factory system on minds and bodies without irreparable damage, damage for which the employer accepted no responsibility. Although it was true that he might pay to have a machine fixed, he never evinced the slightest desire to aid monetarily an injured or ill worker. The reason for this inhumane state of affairs was that the employer considered the expense of having a machine fixed worthwhile; for it had originally cost him something to obtain and simply to abandon and replace it would be financially unwise. This was not the case when it came to the ordinary workingman who could be replaced within an hour of breakdown at absolutely no expense. Yet these men were human beings with family obligations and responsibilities, worries and debts. And even those who were fortunate enough to survive the hazards of unsanitary and unsafe conditions often found themselves dependent on charity in their old age, their capacity for profitable exploitation having been exhausted.

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17 Verville's arguments in favour of fewer hours were economically sound. See Clyde E. Dankert, et al., editors, Hours of Work (Publication Number 32 of the Industrial Relations Research Association.) (New York, Harper and Row, 1965), Herbert R. Northrup, "The Reduction in Hours", pp. 8-9; David G. Brown, "Hours and Output", p. 152.

Employers suggested that the worker could better his present lot and also avoid poverty in the future by studying in the evening. But who could possibly have enough energy to study at night after an interminable and exhausting day spent in a dim and dirty factory? However, increased leisure would permit the labouring man to spend more time in reading rooms and libraries. This intellectual improvement would undoubtedly lead to moral regeneration. The worker would come to abandon his presently deplorable liking for bars and taverns. These offered a soporific, if expensive, form of relaxation and entertainment - to the detriment of his own well-being and that of those dependent upon him.

In conclusion, Verville asked the members of the House to devote a little time<sup>to</sup> studying social conditions in Canada. He was especially insistent that they should make some effort to alleviate the misery in the lives of those women and children who worked in the factories. Without government interference, without legal checks on employers to fetter their single-minded pursuit of wealth, there would be a nightmare of competition among employers seeking to reduce costs through long hours and low wages; life for the worker would be unendurable. A degraded industrial community, steadily growing in numbers, was no basis upon which to build a stable and enlightened nation .

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18 A. Verville, House of Commons Debates, May 7, 1909, pp. 5913-5924.

In his reply to Verville's speech, Lemieux stated that although he could not support the bill as presently drafted, he did feel that it was "legislation well worth studying and investigating"<sup>19</sup>. He challenged Verville's contention that fewer hours would mean less employment<sup>20</sup>. Shorter hours, rather than distributing the same amount of work among more men, would merely lessen the amount of labour in a nation desperately in need of workers to fulfill its industrial potential. Production costs would rise as a result of employers being obliged to pay the workers the same wages for less work. This in turn would raise the cost of Canadian manufactured goods at home and abroad. If Canada was to compete with nations basing their production on cheap labour, her own wage costs must be kept down. And what would happen to the national policy of canal and railway construction if short hours and long winters were permitted to interfere with Canadian growth and development?

Then, too, an eight-hour law on government contracts in Canada would clash with present provincial legislation. Lemieux noted that the American eight-hour act was only enforced where it did not conflict with legislation passed by state legislatures. In the same way, the federal Parliament "could only pass such legislation as regards government works". Private contracts came under the exclusive jurisdiction of the provinces. Hours

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19 R. Lemieux, House of Commons Debates, May 7, 1909, p. 5940.

20 A. Verville, House of Commons Debates, May 7, 1909, p. 5924.

of labour in the various provinces fluctuated between seven to eleven per day. Therefore, if Parliament "were to adopt legislation forcing Dominion contractors to adopt the eight-hour system, we would be in conflict with the usages and customs which exist in the different provinces".

Lemieux argued that enforcement of the Dominion Fair Wages Law of 1900 was the most sensible solution to the problem. Under this law, the government paid the wages and adopted the number of working hours current in the district in which the contract was being carried out. Thus the practices of Dominion contractors did not conflict with the usages and customs of private contractors in the different provinces. Under Verville's bill there would be constant friction by putting "side by side two shifts of men, one working for eight hours and the other for ten and eleven hours, at the same rate of wages". It was not the federal government but public opinion in the provinces that would force shorter hours on those business concerns where  
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 exploitation of the workers was too flagrant .

Both Verville<sup>22</sup> and the Trades and Labour Congress rejected these criticisms of Lemieux. Neither believed that legislation enforcing an eight-hour day on public works would conflict with provincial laws. Nor did

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21 R. Lemieux, House of Commons Debates, May 7, 1909, pp. 5938-5944.

22 Canada, Department of Labour, Report of the Department of Labour for the fiscal year ending March 31, 1910, Sessional Paper Number 36 (Ottawa, King's Printer, 1910), p. 150

they feel that the legislation could be defined as "class", designed to protect the interests of one group in the country against the just rights of any other. The T.L.C. insisted that all the workers asked was that the Dominion government begin to set an example as a model employer<sup>23</sup> .

In June, 1909, Verville acquired a very influential ally to support his bill, Mackenzie King, the new Minister of Labour. King's handling of labour disputes as Deputy Minister of Labour since 1900 led the T.L.C. to believe that he would prove fair and progressive when it came to dealing with the workers' demands for protective legislation<sup>24</sup> . And although King realized that there was a conflict over jurisdiction involved, he nevertheless encouraged Verville to bring forward anew his hours of labour bill. The Minister believed that granted more humane working conditions the workers would be more efficient, and Canada would continue to prosper in a highly competitive age. Shorter hours, therefore, was an issue of national concern, neither radical, socialistic, nor "class" in intent<sup>25</sup> .

"An Act respecting Hours of Labour on Public Works" was introduced once again in the House of Commons on November 22, 1909, and received its second reading on December 9. In the debate which followed this second

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23 Trades and Labor Congress of Canada, Report of Proceedings of the 1909 Annual Convention, pp. 54-55.

24 Ibid., p. 54.

25 Dawson, W. L. M. King, pp. 201-202, 208.

reading, members of both the Liberal and Conservative parties expressed sympathy toward legislation designed to benefit the workers and agreed that the bill "should be referred to a Special Committee of the House of Commons to check the details of the measure concerning its scope and constitutionality .<sup>26</sup>

The Special Committee of House of Commons to which the bill was referred was composed of Members of Parliament, both Liberal and Conservative, from across Canada who were considered capable of judging intelligently the constitutional, economic, and medical consequences of shorter hours on public works. Mackenzie King, Minister of Labour, acted as chairman of an inquiry board of ten M.P.'s including Alphonse Verville .<sup>27</sup>

Trades and Labour Councils and unions, Boards of Trade, the Canadian Manufacturers' Association, individual industrialists, the Dominion Grange, Farmers' Institutes and Breeders' Associations, railway and shipping interests

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<sup>26</sup> Canada, Department of Labour, Report of the Department of Labour for the fiscal year ending March 31, 1910, pp. 150-151.

<sup>27</sup> The other members of the committee were: A. C. Macdonell, Ontario, lawyer, Conservative; Ralph Smith, British Columbia, miners' agent, Liberal but very pro-labour; William Staples, Manitoba, farmer, Conservative; L. E. Prowse, Prince Edward Island, businessman, Liberal; David Marshall, Ontario, processor of canned fruits and vegetables, Conservative; John Stanfield, Nova Scotia, clothing manufacturer, Conservative; Andrew Broder, Ontario, farmer, merchant, customs collector, retired, Conservative; Gustave A. Turcotte, Quebec, physician, Liberal; W. E. Knowles, Saskatchewan, lawyer, Liberal. Ibid., p. 151. The Canadian Parliamentary Guide, 1909, pp. 93-148.

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sent representatives and made submissions to the committee . King's group in turn periodically presented reports to the House of Commons. The committee gathered evidence for five months. As time passed, it became obvious that labour was going to have a struggle on its hands to obtain enactment of Verville's bill .

Apparently the only people in favour of Verville's measure was organized labour. Representatives of some of the unions requested that the scope of the bill be expanded to include all industries . All the other groups mentioned above opposed legislation lowering hours. Employers believed that establishing a system whereby men working on government contracts received the same wages as men working longer hours for private industry would cause resentment, perhaps conflict. They pointed out that there was a shortage of labour in Canada and that lowering hours would accentuate it. Also, shorter hours would lead to higher production costs which could only be overcome by raising prices - especially for carrying out government contracts. Transportation

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28 Canada, Parliament, House of Commons, Special committee on bill number 21 "An act respecting hours of labour on public works", op. cit., Index to Communications, pp. 697-715.

29 Trades and Labor Congress of Canada, Report of Proceedings of the 1910 Annual Convention, pp. 50-51.

30 Canada, Parliament, House of Commons, Special committee on bill number 21 "An act respecting hours of labour on public works", op. cit., Index to Communications, pp. 707-715.

and construction interests insisted that long hours were vital to completion of their business before the long, harsh Canadian winter set in. Farmers saw no reason why workers in industry should work fewer hours than they did. They feared that shorter hours in industry would cause men to desert the farms where labour was so urgently needed<sup>31</sup> .

On May 3, 1910, the Special Committee presented its fourth and final report to the House of Commons and suggested that the "reports, proceedings, evidence and correspondence" gathered during the preceding five months be classified, printed, and distributed to the members of the House of Commons and the Senate that they might become fully informed of the nature of the proposed measure<sup>32</sup> . This was done, and some months later, in December, the bill was submitted for discussion and amendment to the Committee of the Whole House<sup>33</sup> , where it was examined clause by clause by the members present. According to House of Commons procedure, each clause was "separately approved, rejected, or amended in an endeavour to make the bill implement most effectively the general principle already accepted"<sup>34</sup> . As the debate over

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31 Ibid., pp. 697-707, 715.

32 The Labour Gazette, Volume X, Number 5, May, 1910, pp. 1280-1281, quoted and paraphrased.

33 A. Verville, House of Commons Debates, December 15, 1910, p. 1407.

34 R. MacGregor Dawson, The Government of Canada, Second Edition, Revised (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1954), p. 419.

amendment continued, it became obvious to the T.L.C. that Verville's hours of labour legislation had become a political issue on which both parties attempted to manoeuvre for political advantage:

The Opposition sought to commit the Government either to /the eight-hour act/ or against it without itself declaring how it stood. The Government, on the other hand, just as carefully avoided placing itself on record, Hon. Mr. King stating, however, that if the amendments to be proposed were satisfactory to the Government, the Bill would be carried through. If not, the Government would not lend its support. It was quite apparent that Hon. Mr. King had intimated to Mr. Verville what amendments would be satisfactory and the latter had practically to choose between taking the Bill with those amendments or refusing them and taking pot-luck in the House<sup>35</sup>.

Realizing that he had little choice, Verville agreed to certain amendments of his bill so that the principle and practice (however limited) of an eight-hour day would come into effect.

The bill was emasculated by the House of Commons in two successive drafts after the presentation of Verville's original measure. Instead of calling for an eight-hour day on all projects, not emergency in nature undertaken by government or private contractors with federal government approval - whether construction, dredging, war matériel, military and public employee uniforms, or printing - the final draft of the amended bill applied only to "work on public buildings undertaken by the Government by day labour".

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<sup>35</sup> Trades and Labor Congress of Canada, Report of Proceedings of the 1911 Annual Convention, Report of Parliamentary Solicitor John G. O'Donoghue, pp. 57-58.

The penalties for contract violation by contractors for work on public buildings were drastically reduced. The loss of contract and refusal of payment penalties were dropped, to be replaced by minor fine (two hundred dollars and costs) and imprisonment (not more than six months) clauses. This version of the eight-hour bill was passed by the House of Commons on February 13, 1911<sup>36</sup>, but was rejected by the Senate<sup>37</sup>.

Unfortunately for Verville and his relations with the Trades and Labour Congress, he had agreed to the above amendments on his own responsibility. He had consulted neither the T.L.C. Executive nor the T.L.C.'s parliamentary solicitor, John G. O'Donoghue, who had drawn up the original bill. For his independent behaviour, Verville was bitterly criticized by the Congress. O'Donoghue, however, in his annual report submitted to the Congress in September, 1911, agreed with what Verville had done. As O'Donoghue had been out of town, and as the T.L.C. Executive were scattered from coast to coast, Verville had had no choice at the time but agree to amendments if any progress at all were to be made with the bill. Verville's only alternative to conceding the deletions mentioned above was to try to have the original bill passed by a House and a Senate which, scarcely proletarian in character, would have been appalled by its extensive applicability and coercive penalties.

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36 Ibid., pp. 58-62.

37 Dawson, W. L. M. King, p. 202.

As Verville was more interested in seeing the principle of the eight-hour day recognized than in the degree of its application<sup>38</sup>, he choose, on his own authority, to obtain as much as he could. This, O'Donoghue remarked, was in the best tradition of Congress agitation for legislative reforms. Therefore it seemed somewhat unjust that the use of the same tactics by Verville resulted in insults and criticisms on the part of the T.L.C.. After all, the executive officers of the Congress had themselves finally met with Mackenzie King in a futile attempt to convince him to accept amendments to Verville's watered-down measure to make it more effective. Despite their failure, and despite their acknowledgment of the difficulties faced by labour men when seeking protective legislation, they caustically denounced the amendments agreed to by Verville as totally unacceptable and stated that his bill would not receive Congress endorsement<sup>39</sup>.

Undaunted by criticism and failure, Verville in 1912 again moved for leave to introduce a bill "respecting hours of labour on public works". The Conservatives were now in power, and he expressed the hope that his measure would "receive the same support from the members of the Government that it

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38 A. Verville, House of Commons Debates, December 15, 1910, p. 1407.

39 Trades and Labor Congress of Canada, Report of Proceedings of the 1911 Annual Convention, Report of Parliamentary Solicitor John G. O'Donoghue, p. 58. O'Donoghue's defense of Verville was particularly perceptive; his criticism of the T.L.C. was very blunt.

did when they were in opposition"<sup>40</sup> . It seems that such support was not forthcoming. In 1914, he once more presented an eight-hour measure. This<sup>41</sup> one never reached its second reading .

## II

Thus, all Verville's attempts from 1906 until 1914 to obtain passage of an eight-hour day, however limited in its application, came to nothing. Opposition to his bill sprang from many sources. The Canadian Manufacturers' Association conducted an effective, well-organized campaign against the<sup>42</sup> measure , because they felt that an act establishing shorter hours on public works was simply the first step in a plan to get lower hours applied universally - to their economic detriment. They opposed the bill because they were not convinced by Verville's arguments that shortening hours of labour would not also lower production, sales, and profits<sup>43</sup> .

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<sup>40</sup> A. Verville, House of Commons Debates, December 5, 1912, p. 695.

<sup>41</sup> Trades and Labor Congress of Canada, Report of Proceedings of the 1914 Annual Convention, p. 50.

<sup>42</sup> Lipton, op. cit., pp. 116-117.

<sup>43</sup> Canada, Parliament, House of Commons, Special committee on bill number 21 "An act respecting hours of labour on public works", op. cit., pp. 223-224.

The arguments of employers against the bill convinced some workers, particularly the unorganized sectors who lacked the support of a strong union to back their demands for improved standards, that the measure would prove detrimental to their economic well-being<sup>44</sup>. Moreover, many workers had less faith in legislative enactment to obtain fewer hours than in economic coercion, in strike threats<sup>45</sup>. This was an era when their political weakness throughout the nation caused them to feel that the winning of legislative reforms in labour's interests by one lone Member of Parliament was a rather farfetched ambition.

As for the Dominion government, whether Liberal or Conservative, it never seemed willing to exercise its prerogative, such as it was, to shorten hours of labour. Like the provinces, it hesitated to enact legislation as vehemently resisted on economic grounds by manufacturers both large and small. After all, the federal government realized as clearly as anyone else that Canada was a nation of great economic potential. And this economic potential could only be fully developed if Canada were made attractive for investment. And who would invest in a country where government interference in the economy on a national scale seemed to be growing more and more pervasive? However, the labour which Canada needed would only come if

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<sup>44</sup> Trades and Labor Congress of Canada, Report of Proceedings of the 1910 Annual Convention, pp. 29-30.

<sup>45</sup> Richard L. Rowan, "The Influence of Collective Bargaining on Hours", in Dankert, op. cit., pp. 22-23.

employment conditions were appealing enough. The result was that the Dominion government found itself in a dilemma and therefore hedged on the question of hours of labour; on the one hand commiserating with the overworked, underpaid men, on the other hand setting out to attract capital investment and encourage industrial development: not necessarily at the expense of the worker, but at his expense if necessary .

The Trades and Labour Congress supported Verville's demand for hours of labour legislation, despite constant setbacks and despite some criticisms of his tactics to get it passed. Unfortunately, no matter how reasonable his request and no matter how reliable the information he presented to sustain it, his efforts were unsuccessful. Considering the nature, power, and variety of the opposing forces, it is understandable why Verville's bill "respecting hours of labour on public works" failed to be approved time after time.

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46 For a general analysis of labour-capital relations during the Laurier period see: Ferns and Ostry, op. cit., pp. 101-105. For labour's attitude toward the Conservatives see: A. Verville, House of Commons Debates, November 24, 1911, pp. 276-281.

## CHAPTER V

### POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY AND PARTY AFFILIATIONS

#### Part I: The Role of Government

Alphonse Verville dedicated his parliamentary career to improving the socio-economic status of the workers. He believed that Canada's industrial development and progress could not be founded upon the sacrifice of the spiritual, mental, and physical health of the workers<sup>1</sup>. A progressive society rested upon the just allocation of privileges and obligations among all classes of Canadians. The welfare of one group in the nation should not be protected at the expense of any other; the more equitable the distribution of wealth, the more stable would be Canadian society. Upon the government rested the duty to secure economic equality, industrial and social peace. As the power of employers was presently much greater than that of the individual worker, it was to the state that labour must look for effective nationwide protection against exploitation by capital.

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1 A. Verville, House of Commons Debates, May 7, 1909, p. 5924.

Despite his advocacy of governmental interference in the economy, Verville accepted big business as a natural part of the economic scene. Practical and pragmatic, he never forgot that the efficiency requisite for economic progress springs from the profit motive, a motive that would be non-existent in a socialist society where nationalized industries would be run by a technologically unskilled and financially unsophisticated working class. The result would be industrial chaos and production failure<sup>2</sup>. Thus, while Verville undoubtedly respected the ideas of the radical faction of the T.L.C., he recognized the visionary aspects of their dream of a completely nationalized economy. Although he probably agreed with the T.L.C.'s demand for government ownership of public utilities such as transportation, communications, waterworks, and lighting<sup>3</sup>, he himself never supported nationalization on any wider scale.

Just as Verville rejected nationalization on a massive scale, he also rejected the idea of revolution: revolution would certainly not advance the over-all prosperity of the nation the way co-operation among classes would. Indeed, he insisted that legislative reforms in labour's interests were absolutely essential to avoid class war in Canada. Although he put forward the threat of revolution from time to time, it was always regretfully, as a

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<sup>2</sup> Selig Perlman, A Theory of the Labor Movement (New York, Macmillan, 1928), pp. 293-295.

<sup>3</sup> Trades and Labor Congress of Canada, Report of Proceedings of the Annual Conventions, Platform of Principles, 1908-1914.

distasteful last resort. He may have prophesied but he never encouraged revolution as a means of winning the workers their rightful place in society; the losses sustained by this strategy would far outweigh the gains. Moreover, he was too realistic to base his agitation for reform on any strategy or ideology which smacked of outright radicalism and would thus alienate the support he hoped to gain for labour legislation from Liberal and Conservative politicians. Possessing a deep respect for the British tradition of democratic government and its capacity to evolve and improve for the sake of the general welfare <sup>4</sup>, his criticisms of the parliamentary system were always tempered by suggestions as to how it could be reformed peacefully. His description of the House of Commons as the private preserve of the wealthy, who were intent on preventing labouring men from entering it <sup>5</sup>, and his description of the Senate as "the cemetery of the House of Commons" <sup>6</sup> were more warnings of the need for reform than threats of revolution if his advice was not heeded. He may have periodically threatened revolution and a general strike but he never really wanted chaos to break loose <sup>7</sup>. All he desired was that those who had contributed so much to the development of Canada be accorded fair treatment

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<sup>4</sup> The Herald, Montreal, December 24, 1908, Number 303, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> A. Verville, House of Commons Debates, November 24, 1911, p. 281.

<sup>6</sup> Morgan, op. cit., p. 1128.

<sup>7</sup> This is a value judgment.

"in accordance with, and in proportion /to/ their number, their power, their needs, and their rights"<sup>8</sup> .

Convinced that social and economic equality could best be accomplished through peaceful and gradual reform, he tended to play down potentially explosive issues by agreeing to compromises and by encouraging the workers to be patient, even long-suffering a little longer. Nor was he ever "irresponsible" in his statements: his criticisms of the established order were always backed up by a tenacity of detail, by facts and figures drawn from such acceptable authorities on economic matters as the Labour Gazette, Grain Growers' Guide, Canadian Journal of Political Economy, and Industrial Commission Reports, both Canadian and American<sup>9</sup> .

He dismissed the criticisms of those who accused him of being nothing more than a rabble rouser, desirous of inciting class war. One could scarcely expect him to preach peace and harmony in a nation where Christian principles of social justice were so blatantly ignored, not only by selfish industrialists from whom little generosity could be expected but even by legislators, the alleged guardians of the nation. With great bitterness he remarked that the government often appeared more anxious to preserve the natural resources of the nation than the human<sup>10</sup> .

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8 A. Verville, House of Commons Debates, May 21, 1913, p. 10500.

9 Ibid., March 14, 1912, pp. 5070-5075.

10 Ibid., May 21, 1913, pp. 10498-10499.

## Part II: Labour Tribune or Party Politician?

At his presentation to the House of Commons in 1906 Verville<sup>1</sup> announced, "Je serai un député ouvrier, ni pour Laurier, ni pour Borden" . He would act solely as the workers' representative, speaking particularly for the organized members of the T.L.C. The question, however, must now be asked: to what extent was he able to retain his political independence that labour might have a genuine spokesman in Parliament?

As Labour's solitary representative in the House of Commons, Verville was forced to take what help he could get where and when it was offered.<sup>2</sup> Although listened to with respect as the voice of a highly significant section of the people, he was fully aware of the weakness of his position in Parliament and of his need to depend on party support for passage of his legislative reforms. From his speeches it is apparent that he would have preferred that measures affecting labour be treated not as "party" or "class" legislation, but as matters of principle whose implementation would benefit

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1 Rumilly, Histoire..., Volume XI: S. N. Parent, pp. 124-125.

2 See Chapter I, Part III: Alphonse Verville, His Career to 1914.

the whole nation by preventing industrial unrest and economic exploitation. When this did not occur, he made clear his resentment of the fact that labour reforms depended for passage on the goodwill of politicians who tended to regard the workers' well-being as peripheral to that of the farmers and industrialists of Canada. The workingman had exercised his franchise long enough in the interests of Liberal and Conservative "labour friends". If the worker really appreciated the value of his vote, he would begin to use it in a spirit of class consciousness by electing independent Labour politicians. At the moment, those who had contributed so much to the development of the nation were not adequately represented in the councils of government. But the day would come when the masses would finally assert their rights by sending appropriate numbers of their own kind to Parliament: "If they only knew their strength and their power, they would be the masters of the members of this House, who, after all, are only the servants of the people of Canada"<sup>3</sup>.

If Verville had been completely independent he would have played the Conservatives off against the Liberals. In fact he showed no interest in working with the former, despite the fact that it was due to their neutrality

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3 A. Verville, House of Commons Debates, May 21, 1913, p. 10499.

NOTE: Individual industrialists, much wealthier than individual workers, could finance the election of great numbers of their own kind to the House of Commons. This was why Verville was always in favour of raising the indemnity, salary as he preferred to call it, of Members of Parliament. After all, it took money to keep up two residences and to entertain the way M.P.'s were expected to do. Unless the indemnity were raised, ordinary workmen could find few among themselves affluent enough to stand for Parliament. Ibid., May 2, 1906, p. 2525; May 28, 1913, p. 11083.

in 1906 that he was first elected to Parliament and despite the Conservatives' support of the I.D.I. Act<sup>4</sup> and his perennially unsuccessful eight-hour bill<sup>5</sup>. On the other hand, Verville was always reasonable and conciliatory with the Liberals. His demands for immigration controls governing the race and occupation of new Canadians were never as prolonged, insistent, or restrictive as those of the T.L.C. He posed no objections to the influx of farmers to settle the western farmlands, although he did criticize the abuse of the bonus system and the arrival of unwanted skilled industrial workers for whom employment was not always available.

Just prior to the election of 1908, Verville successfully mediated in the long and costly Canadian Pacific Railway strike of 8,000 men across Canada. The Liberals so valued his services in convincing the workers to accept a settlement reached under their new I.D.I. Act that they left him unopposed in the forthcoming election<sup>6</sup>. He acted to salvage a piece of legislation which he believed would help to establish better labour-management relations and for the sake of the job security of the strikers, for whom the C.P.R. was beginning to hire replacements from the United States and England<sup>7</sup>.

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4 R. Borden, House of Commons Debates, February 14, 1907, p. 3045.

5 A. Verville, House of Commons Debates, December 5, 1912, p. 695.

6 Rumilly, Histoire..., Volume XIII: Henri Bourassa, pp. 170-171.

7 La Patrie, Montréal, 6 octobre 1908, numéro 191, p. 1.

However, it was Verville's efforts to obtain passage of his eight-hour bill which most clearly reflected his close liaison with the Liberal party. To obtain this bill he agreed to certain sweeping amendments of his original measure. His unsuccessful co-operation with King to have his bill passed angered the T.L.C., which not only refused to accept the watered-down<sup>8</sup> version of his Act but also accused him of selling out to the Liberals. Yet the Congress itself continued to promote legislation such as the eight-hour day in a non-partisan fashion merely by writing letters in support of the measure to M.P.'s, whether Liberal or Conservative, the Minister of Labour, and the Prime Minister.<sup>9</sup> Although angry at Verville for compromising, the Congress constantly refused to risk alienating the established parties.

Another way in which Verville helped the Liberals was by a bitter attack in February, 1914, on Thomas Crothers, the Conservative Minister of Labour, for his handling of a coal miners' strike on Vancouver Island. The strike had begun in the autumn of 1912, involved 3,700 men and was led and financially supported<sup>10</sup> by the United Mine Workers of America, an affiliate of the American Federation of Labour.<sup>11</sup> Verville claimed that the dispute

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<sup>8</sup> Trades and Labor Congress of Canada, Report of Proceedings of the 1911 Annual Convention, Report of Parliamentary Solicitor John G. O'Donoghue, p. 58.

<sup>9</sup> Trades and Labor Congress of Canada, Report of Proceedings of the 1914 Annual Convention, p. 50.

<sup>10</sup> The total cost of this fight for the U.M.W.A. was one and a half million dollars. Canada, Department of Labour, Labour Organization in Canada, 1914, pp. 49-50.

<sup>11</sup> Logan, op. cit., pp. 145-146.

could have been settled quickly under the provisions of the I.D.I. Act, but Crothers stated that the men had refused such mediation<sup>12</sup>. Verville accused Crothers of defending and protecting the owners at the expense of the men by refusing the workers the right to an impartial inquiry and by suppressing evidence of the employers' culpability concerning dismissal of union men without just cause, low wages, miserable and unsafe working conditions. He argued that the Minister was biased against international unionism and wished to see its power broken no matter how unfair the tactics used against it. He demanded that the next Minister of Labour be an intelligently informed man of practical experience and workingclass origin, one whose interest in labour would be sincere, one who would not "resort to a lot of technicalities to fool the men". He then proposed the following T.L.C.-approved resolution for a vote in the House of Commons:

/Be it resolved/ that the whole conduct of the Minister of Labour in regard to the claims of the rights of the coal miners on the island of Vancouver was marked by persistent negligence and absolute indifference and deserves the censure of this House<sup>13</sup>.

This proposal of censure was voted down after much furious debate in which the Liberals, actively led by Laurier, supported Verville's motion and the Conservatives angrily rejected it<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> The Labour Gazette, Volume XV, October, 1914, p. 485.

<sup>13</sup> A. Verville, House of Commons Debates, February 10, 1914, pp. 650-655; March 3, 1914, pp. 1265-1270.

<sup>14</sup> House of Commons Debates, March 3, 1914, pp. 1270-1328.

Rumilly claims that in return for settling the 1908 C.P.R. strike, Verville was not only left unopposed by the Liberals in the forthcoming election but was also led to believe that he would be Minister of Labour in their next Cabinet (a hope which had also been expressed by the workers during the 1906 election campaign <sup>15</sup>). Insisting that this was an ambition to which Verville clung throughout his political career, Rumilly also states that it was the thwarting of this dream by the appointment of Mackenzie King as Minister of Labour, when Labour was made a separate portfolio in 1909, that caused Verville to vote against the Laurier Naval Service Bill in a childish fit of pique. He changed his mind after the Liberals pointed out to him what building a navy in Canada would mean in terms of employment opportunities and salaries for the workers <sup>16</sup>. By the time of the 1911 general election, he had sufficiently recovered from his alleged disappointment at not being appointed Labour Minister to run as a "Liberal-Labour" M.P. and to write a campaign letter favouring King's re-election and praising him as a fair and sympathetic Minister of Labour. The letter, written at King's request <sup>17</sup>, was intended as an expression of the workers' support of Liberal labour policy; it thanked King for his stand on the eight-hour day - although

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15 La Patrie, Montréal, 13 février 1906, numéro 296, p. 8.

16 Rumilly, Histoire..., Volume XV: Mgr. Bruchési (Montréal, Editions Bernard Valiquette /1945/), pp. 91, 138.

17 W. L. M. King Papers, op. cit., King to Verville, August 14, 1911.

it remained silent concerning his settlement of the Grand Trunk railwaymen's  
 strike of 1910<sup>18</sup>, for which King himself had asked Verville's approval<sup>19</sup>.

In view of the obvious support which Verville gave the Liberals, it is apparent why he came to be regarded as a Laurier stalwart, a partisan politician who, if he did not join the Liberal ranks immediately upon entering the House<sup>20</sup>, had done so by 1911<sup>21</sup>. Believing the Liberals to be more helpful and understanding than the Conservatives when it came to labour legislation, "he gave independent support to the Liberals" but still remained the workers' trusted spokesman<sup>22</sup>. Verville maintained his political integrity and independence of party controls throughout his parliamentary career. In 1912 he described himself as "a free lance" who "does not and will not attend any party caucus"<sup>23</sup>. Even though willing to ally himself informally with the Liberal party for the sake of promoting various issues of importance to labour, he was too much of a radical, he stood too far left of the Liberals

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18 Ibid., Verville to King, August 30, 1911.

19 Ibid., King to Verville, August 14, 1911.

20 Robin, op. cit., p. 392.

21 Rumilly, Histoire..., Volume XV: Mgr. Bruchési, p. 10.

22 H. W. A., "Alphonse Verville, M.P.; Sketches from the House of Commons and the Corridor", The Canadian Courier; The National Weekly, John A. Cooper, editor. Volume XIII, Number 22, May 5, 1913 (Toronto, Courier Press, 1913), p. 9. Verville's dislike of the Conservatives also reflected the outlook of the majority of French Canada.

23 Morgan, op. cit., p. 1128.

to have ever been able to become a formal member of the establishment. For the sake of party discipline he would never have been able periodically to stifle his convictions to condone policies unfavourable to the workers<sup>24</sup> .

Even the Industrial Banner, which in 1911 had had no patience with his<sup>25</sup> behaviour over the eight-hour bill , by 1914 was praising him as a most sensible and effective Labour M.P. and advocating the election of more like<sup>26</sup> him at the next election .

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24 H. W. A., op. cit., pp. 9, 19.

25 Industrial Banner, Hamilton, February, 1911, Number 4, p. 1.

26 Industrial Banner, Toronto, February 27, 1914, Number 20, p. 1.  
This newspaper changed location in 1912 and began to be issued more frequently.

## CHAPTER VI

### VERVILLE'S PARLIAMENTARY CAREER: AN APPRAISAL

Verville saw his demands for immigration controls incorporated into increasingly more selective Immigration Acts; but the bonus system continued and misrepresentation did not completely disappear. His defense of the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act, imperfect though he and the T.L.C. realized it was, reflected his somewhat cynical conviction that bad legislation was better than none, for at least bad could be improved<sup>1</sup>. He failed to improve the condition of the workers' lives either by obtaining legal enforcement of union recognition or by legislating into existence shorter hours. His "Bill respecting Hours of Labour on Public Works" was refused approval time and again. Continued dependence on the goodwill of employers to establish a shorter working day proved both frustrating and futile for exhausted workers.

Normally self-contained and coolly objective when speaking in the House of Commons, there were occasions when Verville's temper flared, reflecting the period of rapid change, of industrial and social revolution in which he lived. But no attempt, however optimistic, could transform him into a compelling, charismatic leader of men. His vision was too narrow,

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<sup>1</sup> A. Verville, House of Commons Debates, January 9, 1907, p. 1173.

his range of topics too limited for any efforts in that direction to be successful. He was neither a radical nor a revolutionary, but a reformer of a pragmatic and realistic cast of mind. Even though he had no overwhelming desire to establish an ideal society or a perfect world, he should not be dismissed as a politician without purpose or ideals. His very lack of ideological rigidity permitted him to agree to compromises; compromises that a Marxist or a doctrinaire socialist would have scorned. Apart from personal ambition, his sense of status and uniqueness as the workers' M.P., it was Verville's belief in the intrinsic and lasting efficacy of legislative enactment which encouraged him to stay in Parliament (constantly hoping for T.L.C. participation in politics), ignoring criticism of his alleged partisan activity for private advancement, willing to be labour's watchdog, preaching co-operation among labour, capital, and government (class collaboration, it was unkindly described by some) for the sake of harmony in the nation.

None of the changes Verville sought were merely "enthusiasms", defended with shallow rhetoric and soon dropped if proved difficult to establish. But his desire to bring about social justice and economic equality in Canada was an impossible ambition for one man to fulfill, given the attitude of government and capital toward labour at the time. Yet although he lacked the financial and numerical support of a powerful lobby to back up his demands for legislative action, at least some progress in this direction resulted from his career in politics. Verville's political activity demonstrated how badly Canadian labour needed an independent labour party of its own; and his career as a "Liberal-Labour" M.P. was an important if faltering step at the federal level toward the development of such a party.

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## Interview

Dr. Eugene A. Forsey, Tuesday, January 16, 1968.