**Equal Opportunities**

When Premier Louis J. Robichaud addressed delegates at the New Brunswick Federation of Labour convention in the ballroom of the Brunswick Hotel in Moncton at the end of August 1965, he presented himself as a friend and ally of the union movement. From the start, speaking in French, he declared his respect for the mission of organized labour: “Je considère très important le mouvement que vous avez entrepris et j’ai à coeur les intérêts de tous les travailleurs, de tous les ouvriers du Nouveau-Brunswick.” He also paid tribute to former president James Whitebone, who had been honoured for his long service earlier in the day, briefly joking that Whitebone probably did not understand him when he spoke in French. For the rest of the hour, Robichaud followed his text in deliberate and articulate English, elaborating on
the theme that the provincial government and the Federation must continue to “work together on the common ground of improving the lot of the citizens of New Brunswick.”

Turning to history, Robichaud quoted Thomas Carlyle, the great nineteenth-century social critic of the British Industrial Revolution: “A man willing to work and unable to find work is perhaps the saddest sight that fortune’s inequality exhibits under the sun.” “This sight,” said Robichaud, “is no less sad today than it was in Carlyle’s time. Today we do not ascribe it to fortune’s inequality. We see it as a social waste and are determined to end it.” This could only be achieved, he said, by recognizing that modern New Brunswick was in the middle of a social and economic revolution as dramatic as the Industrial Revolution of the previous century and as daunting as the challenge of decolonization in the modern world: “Most nations today are development minded. The less developed countries which have been poor and stagnant for centuries are in a state of revolt against poverty, disease and dominance by stronger nations. They are no longer disposed to entrust their future exclusively to the forces of the market, the whims of nature or the judgement of colonial rulers.”

Robichaud’s cautious allusion to a rhetoric of decolonization implied that the province was on the road to a kind of liberation from the limited visions of the past. Economic growth in New Brunswick had been accelerating since 1945, he said, but the province needed major improvements in training and education. Furthermore, New Brunswick workers needed better working conditions and wages, and regional disparities would have to be addressed as never before: “We will have to recognize that the wage gap between the Atlantic Region and the rest of Canada must close. If we ignore this fact we will merely train for export.” In short, future economic growth would depend not just on natural resources and industrial activity but also on investment in the people of the province. Modern development, Robichaud concluded, was not just an economic matter but the opportunity to enrich provincial society in all respects:
Human resource development is the process of increasing the knowledge, the skills, and the capacity of all of the people in a society. In economic terms, it could be described as the accumulation of human capital and its effective deployment in the development of an economy. In political terms, human resource development prepares people for adult participation in society, particularly as citizens in a modern democracy. From the social and cultural point of view the development of human resources helps people to lead fuller and richer lives, less bound by tradition.\(^3\)

This commitment to social change was a welcome message for the labour delegates. They understood that Robichaud’s social outlook had been framed by his modest origins in an Acadian family in Kent County. Like many New Brunswickers, Robichaud wanted his province to join the modern march of progress. His education by reform-minded teachers at Laval University had convinced him that enlightened public policies and an interventionist state could make a difference. In the 1960 election campaign, Robichaud had already appealed for labour support by promising to pass an Equal Pay Act to ensure better pay for women workers, and he had promised to pay for the province’s new hospital insurance plan without imposing premiums. By 1965 his Programme of Equal Opportunity, sometimes described as New Brunswick’s parallel to the Quiet Revolution in Québec, was hitting its stride with plans for higher standards of education, health, and services. Such reforms served the purposes of employers and governments who wanted to modernize the economy, but they were also elements of the modern welfare state with its promise of greater security and higher standards. The Federation of Labour had been pursuing these kinds of social democratic goals from its earliest years, and those in the union movement in the 1960s came to see Premier Robichaud as a partner in advancing their own agenda for social reform.\(^4\)

The expectation that labour was coming into its own in New Brunswick had been there since the end of the Second World War, but the province still had a long way to go. When a University of New Brunswick economics student
completed a survey of wages, hours, and working conditions in 1957, he came to the conclusion that most workers in the woods, mining, agriculture, and manufacturing in the province did not earn the “standard wage” of $900 a year required to support a family.⁵ Government reports repeatedly indicated that New Brunswick citizens had incomes about one-third lower than the Canadian average, placing them behind all provinces but Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island.⁶ Yet, there were hopes at the end of the 1950s that the tide was beginning to turn. According to a new magazine published by the Canadian Labour Congress, there were signs of a “New Day” in New Brunswick based on new industrial developments. The power of the St. John River was being harnessed at Beechwood, the pulp and paper mills were expanding in several parts of the province, and there were new lead, zinc, and silver discoveries in the north.⁷

New Brunswick workers wanted unions to be part of this new wave of progress in the province. During the 1950s and the 1970s, they were joining unions in large numbers, and collective bargaining was becoming an accepted part of the world of work. Between 1957 and 1962, a total of 182 new union locals were certified to represent workers; between 1963 and 1968 the total was 400, with a record of 101 locals certified in 1966 alone.⁸ The number of union members in the province more than doubled from 31,421 in 1958 to 79,161 in 1975. This indicated a substantial rise in union density, from 17.2 percent of the workforce in 1958 to 31.1 percent in 1975.⁹ As the principal voice of labour in the province, the Federation was also rising to new levels. The affiliated membership, reported at 16,169 members in 1957, showed steady gains, rising to 27,882 members by 1968 and 44,545 members by 1975. The “new unionism” of the times led workers to believe that the unions could produce benefits for all citizens. In a Labour Day tribute in 1960, a local weekly newspaper in northern New Brunswick captured these expectations in a cartoon with the title “Getting to the Top with an Experienced Guide!”; it showed “Organized Labour” as the lead climber advancing up the side of a mountain called “Higher Living Standard.”¹⁰
Whitebone vs. MacLeod

When the Federation’s first “merged convention” met at the Lord Beaverbrook Hotel in Fredericton in 1957, the event was considered a new beginning for the organization, and Fredericton Labour Council President W. Arthur MacLean presented Whitebone with a new wooden gavel for the occasion. Following adoption of a new constitution, Whitebone stated that “this is the starting point of bigger and better things.”

Mayor William Walker of Fredericton, who was elected that year with labour support, endorsed the Federation’s effort to “obtain economic justice for those you represent.” Premier Hugh John Flemming also acknowledged the importance of the Federation, and Minister of Labour Arthur Skaling, the veteran union member, reviewed the record of the provincial government and stated: “Present high wage levels, shorter hours, pension plans and other benefits are convincing evidence of your growing strength. The growing body of social legislation indicates the extent of your influence in public affairs.”

There was less self-congratulation when Angus MacLeod, the former president of the New Brunswick Council of Labour, addressed the delegates. There was “much propaganda about the prosperity in the Province,” he said, but he warned against
concluding there was little left for labour to achieve. He pointed to the recent shutdown at the Milltown cotton mill and the near-idle dry dock in Saint John as examples of wasted opportunity and governmental failure: “No concrete action will come until we of the Labour movement take some definite action to remedy the situation.” In all their history, MacLeod told the delegates, “there have been no advancements, no benefits, obtained by working people without a struggle and sacrifice.” Whether it was workers’ compensation or unemployment insurance or any other benefit or reform, “We have not been handed anything by governments or any group without a struggle. . . . We are not going to be given anything unless we fight for it, one way or another.” He also urged delegates not to accept the claim that workers in the province and the region did not have the right to a standard of living comparable to workers in other parts of Canada: “The sorry part of it is that in many cases the Labour movement has accepted that. . . . But have any of us ever heard an employer saying that ‘My business is not entitled to the same percentage of profit on my investment as that of a similar employer in Upper Canada’?”

Two years later, MacLeod replaced Whitebone as president. At the Federation meetings in Edmundston in September 1959, there were few signs that Whitebone’s leadership was in question. His presidential report drew attention to the enactment of the province’s Hospital Care Insurance Act and to the continued need to improve laws such as the Vacation Pay Act, which still excluded many workers from even one week’s paid vacation. He repeated the Federation’s appeal for union rights for public sector workers. He spoke too at length on developments in Newfoundland, where the provincial government had adopted “the most vicious type of anti-labour legislation ever enacted in this country” in order to break a strike by the province’s loggers, represented by the International Woodworkers of America. In response to the Escuminac Disaster, when thirty-five men and boys were lost at sea when their fishing boats were overcome in a storm on Miramichi Bay, he offered condolences to the widows and children and appealed for donations to the Fishermen’s Disaster Relief Fund: “Labour has close kinship with these hardy people.” A collection was taken up at the convention and matched from Federation funds.
The only issue that provoked extended debate was a resolution on political action. Some controversy had been expected, as the Canadian Labour Congress was preparing the ground for the creation of a “New Party” to replace the CCF with a political party that would be a more effective voice for Canadian workers and other “liberally minded” citizens. When the convention opened at the New Royal Hotel in Edmundston, a civic welcome was delivered by Mayor Harry Marmen, who in 1944 had been one of the most successful CCF candidates in the history of the province. The most notable guest speaker was Stanley Knowles, the longtime CCF MP from Winnipeg who was now a CLC vice-president and travelling across the country to promote the “New Party.” Knowles had a union background as a printer (and his mother had grown up in Saint John, the daughter of a domestic servant), but he was best known as a contemporary of Tommy Douglas, Canada’s most successful socialist politician, with whom he had been a fellow student at Brandon College in the 1920s. In his address to the delegates, Knowles argued that the union movement had a large social responsibility: “Labour is not just a group seeking its own ends, but across the years has been a social force winning better conditions for all the people of the country.”

Political action was required because the unions must work both “economically and politically”: “In the labour movement we have so much to do that we must not tie one arm behind our back.” Delegates were well aware that, as Knowles pointed out, most of the resolutions on the Federation agenda related to issues that required political action. The real controversy was whether unions could achieve the best results by supporting existing parties or by formal affiliation to a new party. When the Resolutions Committee presented a statement in favour of continuing to “take a non-partisan part in politics,” a 90-minute debate followed. When a roll call vote was taken, the resolution of non-partisanship was approved by a vote of 83 to 31.15

Whitebone was with the majority on this issue, but the following day the delegates unexpectedly voted to replace him as president. Many were obviously wondering if Whitebone was ready to provide continued leadership into the decade of the 1960s.16 Meanwhile, MacLeod had shown himself
to be an informed and experienced advocate. The fact that MacLeod had
opposed the “non-partisan” resolution served notice on the “old” parties
not to take labour’s support for granted. MacLeod defeated Whitebone by
a small margin, a vote of 64 to 57. After twenty-seven consecutive years in
office, Whitebone was suddenly cast aside. Delegates could see a few tears in
his eyes as he reminisced briefly about the history of the Federation and stated
his pride in their achievements: “We have made a big contribution and we
have gained a position of respect and prestige, not only in the labour move-
ment, but with the general public.”

1959 Angus MacLeod (seated, second from left) became president of the Federation in
1959. Other executive members included (seated, from left) W. A. MacLean, Fredericton;
James H. Leonard, Saint John; Charles A. Malchow, Bathurst; and (standing, from left)
Frank W. Murray, Saint John; Ralph J. Boyd, Moncton; Michael J. Kenny, Newcastle;
MacLeod’s own term of office proved to be surprisingly short. By the time of the next convention, one delegate was stating that the past year had set the union movement back twenty years, and “as a result organized labour has lost its position of respect in this province.” This was an exaggeration, as MacLeod and other officers continued to promote the Federation’s views on public issues and lobby the government to act on their resolutions. MacLeod’s report as president reviewed several legal controversies, including one in which union certification was withheld after the employer appealed to the province’s Supreme Court. He also noted that unemployment was rising and that governments should not be allowed to ignore these needs: “If private enterprise cannot provide employment at decent wages for all willing and able to work, then it is the responsibility of government at all levels to do so.”

The biggest surprise in MacLeod’s term of office was his decision to accept nomination in the 1960 provincial election as one of the four Liberal candidates in Saint John. In election publicity that summer, the Liberals took full advantage and described him as a “labour candidate on the Liberal ticket.” MacLeod was quoted as stating that the Flemming government had taken no action on labour’s most important demands but that the Liberals would deliver results: “I have been given the assurance by my fellow candidates that the major demands of labour will be enacted and it is for this reason only that I offer as a Liberal candidate in the election on behalf of the working people.”

MacLeod’s claim that if elected he would “speak officially for labour” in the legislature was partly a response to the failure of the Progressive Conservatives, since the death of Skaling in May, to include an identifiable “labour” candidate on their slate in Saint John. MacLeod himself may have been hoping to become minister of labour in a Robichaud government. The announcement of his nomination prompted Whitebone to write directly to CLC Secretary-Treasurer Donald MacDonald to state that MacLeod’s actions had created “a terrific furore among our people here” and that he needed to know whether the CLC approved of this and “if so, how does this square with Congress’ attitude towards the proposed new party, to say nothing of Mr. MacLeod’s open support of the said new party.” There was no direct response
from Ottawa, but in an internal memo MacDonald noted: “We should not make any statement thru Jim but I think we should consider issuing some sort of release or circular stating the CLC endorses no candidates in N.B., or at least no Liberal candidates.” 21 There were no CCF candidates at all in the provincial election that year. In Saint John, MacLeod proved his appeal by receiving a final count of 8,846 votes, a substantial result for a labour candidate of any description, but in this case not enough to win election. Even with four seats in Saint John, the voters supported the incumbent Conservatives, even as the Liberals came to power with a strong majority.22

MacLeod’s position was increasingly awkward by the time of the Federation convention in Campbellton at the end of the summer. It was expected that Whitebone would attempt to reclaim the presidency. Then, to MacLeod’s embarrassment, the delegates learned that the Federation’s financial affairs were in disarray. There was no report from Secretary-Treasurer James Leonard, who had not performed his duties for several months and had left the province; instead, an auditor appointed by the CLC reported that irregularities and missing documents made it impossible to give the Federation a clean financial bill of health. The auditor noted that prior to the convention, MacLeod had personally made restitution of $2,300 to the accounts, which covered all but $50 of the funds that were not accounted for by himself and the secretary-treasurer. At the start of the convention, MacLeod addressed the delegates in a closed session, taking personal responsibility for the situation. According to the convention report, “He said the Federation had had a busy year and he had no apologies to make in this regard. He knew what he had done was wrong and asked that the delegates think of his record and exercise forbearance in their criticism of him.” Then he turned the chair over to one of the veteran vice-presidents, Michael Kenny of Newcastle, and departed for Saint John.23

Whitebone’s return to office was opposed by two candidates. Both represented a younger generation of union members who wanted to continue the transition to new leadership. One of them was a local leader from Dalhousie, Aurèle Ferlatte, who had joined his first union, the Canadian Seamen’s Union, when he served on Canadian merchant vessels during the Second World War.
He returned to the province after the end of the war and became an active member of the International Brotherhood of Pulp, Sulphite and Paper Mill Workers at the International Paper mill. Meanwhile, in Fredericton, Phillip Booker was a local youth who had worked in the lumber industry before going into the air force in 1939; he later joined the Fredericton police and was active in the labour council as well as in the police union, which became a local of the National Union of Public Employees. At the start of the 1960 convention, Booker introduced the union’s national director R.P. Rintoul, who had presented a charter to the New Brunswick Division of NUPE at their convention in Bathurst a few days earlier. Both Ferlatte and Booker were already playing their part in provincial labour history and had substantial support, but neither was able to defeat Whitebone. In a three-way contest, Whitebone received a majority of the votes on the first ballot. 

None of this controversy helped to advance the “New Party.” When the New Democratic Party was founded in August 1961, only a handful of New Brunswick union delegates attended the Ottawa convention. Later the same month there was more heated debate at the Federation meetings in Moncton. The Resolutions Committee failed to endorse any of the resolutions submitted in support of the NDP, and many delegates lined up at the microphones to speak their piece. Ferlatte pointed to the recent provincial election results: “Where are the Labour men in the Liberal party? There was not one elected. We are a vast majority in the population but we are not represented in the political parties. Every government is made up of lawyers, doctors and professionals.” Normand Bourque of Moncton stated that “when the pioneers organized unions they were called idiots, but today we are unionized. Today we enter another field, and who can say we should not have our rights in politics.” Fred Hodges of Saint John added: “All that is being asked is that we endorse the New Democratic Party and if we do not endorse it all Canada will be laughing at us tomorrow.” On the other side of the debate, Ken Hussey of the paper mill workers in Bathurst noted that his union’s constitution prohibited “political or religious agitation” at union meetings. Yvon LeBlanc of the Moncton machinists argued that labour’s role should be to strengthen
the union movement by promoting the training and education of members, not to build a political party. Vice-president Kenny stated that individuals had every right to be politically active, but “by endorsing the New Party, all they do is make a political machine of the Federation, which it was never intended to be.”

As chair of the convention, Whitebone was determined to avoid deepening the conflict. At the next morning’s session, he objected to the report of the previous day’s debate in the Telegraph-Journal, which had stated that the Federation was “split” and that the issue was “too hot to handle.” In fact, said Whitebone, there had been an orderly debate, which was not about “affiliation” as such but about endorsement of the new party. This was a somewhat misleading distinction, as the original resolutions had called for the Federation to encourage member unions to affiliate to the party. However, the Resolutions Committee seized on this approach, and the delegates were asked to adopt a substitute resolution to support the “principles and policies” of the NDP “without direct affiliation.” Whitebone then indicated that there had been sufficient discussion on the previous day and ruled further debate out of order. A few hands were raised against the compromise, but to Whitebone’s satisfaction, the resolution was adopted. As he subsequently explained, the NDP’s policies were “almost identical to those the Federation has adopted from time to time through the years and I fail to see how the Federation could not endorse its own policies.” Despite Whitebone’s skillful handling of the issue, the Telegraph-Journal reported the Federation had failed to support “a resolution more favorable to the new left-wing party,” and the next day’s headline stated: “New Party Fails to Get Full Support in N.B.”

By this time, the new Liberal government was already beginning to address some of labour’s expectations. The Minister of Labour, Kenneth J. Webber, was not a union man like Skaling, but he had grown up in a union town, St. Stephen, and worked there as a customs officer prior to his election. At the 1961 convention, he boasted that one of the first laws passed by the Robichaud government was the Female Employees Fair Remuneration Act, which prohibited an employer from paying women workers at a lower rate than a man
doing the same work. In 1965 he was also able to report that the province’s minimum wage standards no longer discriminated between male and female employees as they had in the past; however, it remained the case that different minimum rates applied in several sectors. The Robichaud government also passed a number of small amendments to the Labour Relations Act that had far-reaching consequences. One provided that municipal employees now fell within the scope of the legislation “without option on the part of a municipal authority.” This had the effect of making collective bargaining rights available to all municipal employees, including those working for hospital and school boards. Another amendment permitted both employers and unions to file charges concerning violations of the act, effectively spreading responsibility for the labour relations system beyond the departmental bureaucracy. On a more critical note, Whitebone stated in 1961 that some three hundred employees had lost their jobs when the Liberals took power and the Federation planned to pursue test cases in order to challenge a “vicious and outdated institution which perpetuates the old belief that ‘to the victors belong the spoils.’”

Whitebone continued to lead the Federation until he retired again as president in 1964, at seventy years of age. During these last years, he considered the leading issue for labour to be the unacceptably high levels of unemployment and underemployment in the province, and he repeatedly called for new public works and new resource development. Another of Whitebone’s continual concerns was the lack of good, affordable housing in the province, and in 1962 he pointed to the new model town of Oromocto, adjacent to the expanded Canadian Forces Base Gagetown, where the government had taken on a major project to provide low-cost quality housing. In 1963, Whitebone reported that revisions to the Workmen’s Compensation Act had been accomplished, which he claimed made it the best such legislation in Canada. Meanwhile, a range of new issues was also appearing on the Federation agenda. In 1962, the Resolutions Committee brought forward a call to amend the Labour Relations Act to prevent the hiring of strikebreakers during labour disputes. There were resolutions calling for a comprehensive national medicare plan, rent controls, improved vacation pay, and better
compensation for silicosis victims. Another committee called for preparation of a union label shopper’s guide, which was published the following year, in both English and French editions. There was also support for a meeting of officers from the labour federations in all the Atlantic Provinces, with a view to strengthening regional cooperation among labour organizations.  

At the Edmundston convention in 1964, Mayor Fernand Nadeau (later a provincial minister of labour) announced that Whitebone was to be proclaimed an honorary citizen of the “république” of Madawaska in recognition of his service to the province. In his address, Whitebone took the opportunity, as he had done many times before, to point out the leading place the Federation had come to occupy in the public life of the province over the past half-century. This achievement must be preserved, he said, and it would always be necessary to guard against those who aimed at “curtailment of union rights and functions and rendering our organizations impotent and ineffective.” Looking ahead to the election of new officers, Whitebone encouraged members to find personal fulfillment in the responsibilities of leadership: “There is no more rewarding service than that rendered to the working people, and to be chosen to represent and serve them is a privilege and an honour not to be considered lightly.”

**New Members**

Meanwhile, the face of the Federation was changing in several ways in the early 1960s. In the 1962 election of officers, for instance, Frederick Douglas Hodges was chosen as one of the two trustees, the first delegate of Afro-Canadian origins to hold office in the history of the Federation. In 1969, he became a vice-president and served until 1975. A descendant of the Black Loyalists who came to the province in the eighteenth century, he was named for one of the great black civil rights leaders of the nineteenth century. Hodges grew up in an all-white neighborhood in west Saint John and was one of the few blacks to attend Saint John High School. He left school before graduation in the 1930s to work as a freighthandler for the CPR. At that time he was unable
to become a member of his own union, which required that black members belong to separate lodges. When the union finally abolished the colour bar at the end of the Second World War, he became in 1946 the first black member of the local Brotherhood of Railway and Steamship Clerks. Almost at once Hodges started to attend labour council meetings, where longtime members gave him a welcome reception. In 1964 he replaced Whitebone as president of the Saint John and District Labour Council and held the office for ten years. In 1974 he ran as a labour candidate in municipal politics and served three terms on Common Council.34

Another important pioneer was Dorothy Power, one of the slowly increasing number of women delegates at the conventions. In 1964 there were only twelve women delegates, a small group who accounted for only 7 percent of the total number. Power herself first attended in 1961, as a delegate for Local 636, International Typographical Union, in Moncton. She had worked originally as a telephone and telegraph operator for CN during the Second World War but was forced to leave because the railroad refused to employ married women after the war. She then went to work as a typesetter for the daily newspapers in Moncton, where she was employed for thirty-eight years.
The ITU had long followed a policy of equal pay for men and women members, and Power became active at all levels of the union, eventually serving as Canadian chair for the Communication Workers of America. At the Federation meetings, Power initially failed to win election as a trustee in 1962, and when she offered again in 1963, there was a tie vote. The chairman decided against her on the toss of a coin. Power was finally elected by acclamation in 1964, making her the first woman officer of the Federation in more than forty years. Later she was also elected president of the Moncton and District Labour Council, the first woman to hold this position. Meanwhile, in order to advance the status of women within the Federation, in 1963 delegates from Moncton Local 51 of the National Union of Public Employees proposed the election of a vice-president-at-large, to be held by a woman officer, in order to “give women of the province direct representation on the Executive Council.” This was opposed by the delegates, including Frank Crilley of the Saint John and District Labour Council, who was usually considered a man of the left within the politics of the Federation. Crilley argued that there was “no need of extending extra advantages to our sister delegates, as the female delegates are equal in every respect to any male delegate, and we have always fought for equal rights for women.”

This was a mixed welcome, but over the course of the next decade, the number of women delegates increased significantly, reaching a total of fifty-four in 1975 — more than four times as many as in 1964 though still only 14 percent of the total delegates that year. There was also more attention to the issues that women brought to the convention meetings. In 1967, delegates listened to an address by Grace Hartman, the new national secretary-treasurer of the Canadian Union of Public Employees, on “The Role of Women in the Trade Union Movement.” Women were in the work force to stay, said Hartman: “Women have become an integral and necessary part of Canada’s working force — they are essential to its economic growth. But if they are to reap the due rewards of their labours they must also become an integral and vital part of the trade union movement.” The following year the Federation approved a constitutional amendment that
added “age” and “sex” to the organization’s statement of purposes: “To encourage all workers without regard to race, creed, age, sex, colour, and national origin to share in the full benefits of union organization.” In 1970 the Federation endorsed a resolution supporting the right to maternity leave without loss of benefits or seniority. In 1971 the Federation called on the province to provide assistance to daycare centres, and in 1973 they called for legislation to regulate daycare standards.36

The visibility of Acadian union members was also on the rise within organized labour during these years. The most prominent Acadian during the Whitebone era was Rolland Blanchette, one of the longtime leaders of Local 29 of the International Brotherhood of Pulp, Sulphite and Paper Mill Workers at the Fraser mill in Edmundston. He was elected a regional vice-president continuously from 1955 to 1976. Blanchette was often a delegate from the Edmundston and District Trades and Labour Council, which was established in 1947 and strongly supported by the millworkers and railway unions. Although the vast majority of local union members and officers were French-speaking, the labour council considered the outside union movement to be a primarily anglophone milieu, for English remained the language of record in their own minutebooks until 1977.37 In Dalhousie, a community with more equal numbers of anglophone and francophone workers, another strong local of the paperworkers was instrumental in gaining ground for Acadian workers. With Aurèle Ferlatte as president, Local 146 challenged the traditional job hierarchies and favouritism that limited Acadians to the ranks of unskilled and semi-skilled labour. The union also succeeded in ending the exclusion of Acadian women with clerical and secretarial skills from employment on the mill’s office staff. One industrial relations specialist has noted that once the union had demonstrated that they were prepared to go on strike to end discrimination in hiring practices, there was a visible change in the attitude of management, who learned to “handle ethnic problems intelligently.” Ferlatte himself served as a vice-president of the Federation in 1961 and 1962 and became regional vice-president for Atlantic Canada when the Canadian Paperworkers Union was created in 1974.38
Another notable Acadian presence at the Federation meetings was the Caraquet union organizer Mathilda Blanchard, whose presence raised issues of gender and ethnicity both. She attended for the first time as a guest in 1967. President Lofty MacMillan welcomed her warmly and noted that she was bringing new members into the union movement through her work with fish plant workers on the Acadian Peninsula. Blanchard, who had worked as a hairdresser in Caraquet for many years, was drawn into union activity by her customers, who often told her about their low pay, working conditions, and other grievances. Blanchard was familiar with the potential of union organization and told delegates that she had first joined a union as a young woman when she was working in Windsor, Ontario, in the 1940s. The Maritimes needed strong unions, she stated, in order to counteract the effects of poor wages and poor conditions: “I believe, I sincerely believe, that if New Brunswick and the Maritime Provinces are so economically backward — we hear that all the time — it’s because the labour movement was not strong enough before in these parts.” Blanchard’s comments were greeted with applause, and in response to MacMillan’s advice to add comments in French, she repeated her statement in her mother tongue. She also added the observation that there was not enough French spoken at the meetings. A similar comment was made by Québec Federation of Labour President Louis Laberge, who noted the large number of francophones in attendance as well as the efforts of the Federation to address the issue: “Il y a je pense plus de délégués canadiens-français à cette convention ici que nous avons de délégués de langue anglaise au Congrès de la FTQ, et pourtant nous avons la
By 1972, the Federation was making some progress on bilingualism, as several reports and documents were prepared in both languages, and this was the first convention to feature simultaneous translation. A committee chaired by Blanchette called for continued improvements in bilingual services, and their report was adopted by the convention. By this time, Blanchard was in attendance as a representative of the Canadian Seafood Workers Union, together with several women delegates from the fish plants on the Acadian Peninsula. In a discussion of plans for a full-time executive secretary for the Federation, Blanchard argued that the position should be designated as bilingual and that she did not want to see the Federation of Labour divide into separate organizations based on language. A crude remark from the back of the hall — “you smell like fish anyway” — led Blanchard and four women delegates to walk out in protest: “If we cannot get French, we’re getting the hell out.” They returned later in the day, and President Paul LePage attempted to calm the waters by stating that the Federation was already well ahead of the provincial government in providing bilingual services. The issue remained a lively one into the 1980s, as did the unresolved status of women within the Federation.40

In the expanding labour activism of this period, a long-overdue breakthrough arrived in the woods, where unions had failed to have a lasting impact despite the earlier work of organizations such as the New Brunswick Farmer-Labour Union. Efforts resumed with the organization of the Restigouche Woodsmen’s Union in 1949, which soon represented men cutting wood for more than a dozen contractors supplying International Paper at Dalhousie. However, when they attempted to expand to other mills, the union faced resistance from employers who continued to benefit from some of the lowest wages, longest hours, and most dangerous conditions in the Canadian woods. Workers tried to shore up their position in 1953 by joining
the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners, as Lumber and Sawmill Workers Local 3012. This did not produce results until ten years later, when the union won the right to bargain for workers employed in the woods by the Fraser mills at Newcastle in 1963 and Atholville in 1964 as well as workers at Bathurst Power and Paper, South Nelson Forest Products, and other mills. By the end of the decade, Local 3012 represented almost 2,500 woods workers in the province, more than one-third of the work force in the woods. Their collective agreements covered not only the usual issues of wages, hours, seniority, and grievances, but also many of the conditions of work in the woods, such as supplies for camps and kitchens, the care of chainsaws and horses, and the use of equipment and clothing. A study of the arrival of unions in this sector has noted that by the 1960s the long years of substandard conditions had created serious labour shortages and that the acceptance of unions was a belated attempt by employers to improve the appeal of woods work.41

One of the more dramatic struggles of the early 1960s was the campaign to win recognition at the large new Irving Oil refinery in east Saint John. In 1960, soon after the refinery opened, the employees voted overwhelmingly to join the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers International Union, the union that represented workers at other Canadian refineries. The first agreement signed by Local 9-691 was relatively weak, and by 1963, with the refinery boasting high productivity and low costs, the union was determined to bring wages up to the standard in the industry. This would require much more than the additional 15 cents an hour that Irving proposed, an offer based on the company’s stated position that local workers should expect low wages: “No major departure from the economic position of this area should be undertaken solely for the purpose of meeting this industry pattern.”

The strike started in September 1963 and did not end until the following March. In a province where the Irving empire employed as many as one in ten workers, this was described as a David and Goliath battle. The strikers, some of whom had union experience from other refineries, did not lack determination. But when they called for a boycott of Irving gas stations, the courts issued injunctions to prevent picketing, and when they submitted radio
advertisements, local stations refused to accept them. The strikers turned out to march in the street, demonstrate in the Loyalist cemetery, and burn K. C. Irving in effigy. When the union negotiator arranged a compromise settlement, the members voted by a ratio of four to one to reject it.

This struggle in Saint John attracted attention around the province and across the country, and the union appealed for donations and solidarity: “Are you going to allow that a group of workers be slaughtered by an employer whose trade union notions are those of feudalism?” A strike by Irving truck drivers at more than a dozen locations in Québec raised the stakes for the company, and in the end there was an agreement in which improvements in the wage scale were disguised as “merit” pay. The union also, without publicity, paid a $2,000 settlement to compensate Irving for damage to his reputation during the strike. It was a bitter struggle, but Premier Robichaud did his best to draw a positive picture of the outcome: “I personally am delighted that the parties have overcome the differences which separated them, and hope New Brunswick may continue to enjoy the progress to be obtained through harmonious relations in labour.”

Most of the union growth in the late 1950s and early 1960s was in the industrial sector among traditional blue-collar workers, but the unions were also breaking ground in new areas. When the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union launched a campaign at grocery stores in the fall of 1958, organizer Walter Kensit pitched a tent in King’s Square in Saint John to draw public attention to their efforts at the Dominion store there. By Christmas the union had thirty-three members, and Local 1065 was chartered on 6 January 1959. The Labour Relations Board failed to grant certification, however, until the union also organized the other two Dominion stores in Saint John. Within the next few years the RWDSU was certified to represent workers at several retail establishments across the province, including the Dominion stores in Moncton, Newcastle, Bathurst, Dalhousie, Fredericton, and Edmundston. The union also faced much employer resistance in this sector. In Moncton, a long campaign at Eaton’s, one of the most anti-union employers in the retail sector in Canada, failed to win a majority of the employees. In other cases,
there was some hard-earned success. When workers at the Sobeys stores in Saint John joined the union and received certification in July 1968, they did not gain a first contract until March 1969. They were on strike most of that winter, and unions showed solidarity by picketing Sobeys stores in other parts of the province.\textsuperscript{43}

\textit{Public Employees}

The unions took on their biggest union challenge in the public sector. Although provincial government employees were not entitled to union rights under the existing Labour Relations Act, there was some progress at other levels. Slowly but surely, workers were signing up in unions in the province’s municipalities, school boards, and hospitals. As organizer for the National Union of Public Employees, Lofty MacMillan often met resistance from local elites. When recruiting union members in hospitals at Dalhousie, Campbellton, and Chatham, he found it useful to travel with a box of papal encyclicals on the Labour Question in order to refute claims that unions were contrary to Catholic teaching. Even then, success in forming a union local was only the beginning. When hospital workers at the Hôtel-Dieu de l’Assomption in Moncton met at the Carpenters’ Hall and organized Local 821 of NUPE in November 1960, there was vocal opposition from the hospital, which was run by a Québec-based religious order, the Soeurs de la Providence. The union won certification by a bare majority of one vote in 1961, and then it took another year to secure a contract. When a conciliation board finally recommended a settlement in 1962, the hospital did not accept the agreement until the union threatened to go out on strike the next day. Local 821 went on to play an active part in the Moncton and District Labour Council and the Federation of Labour. As MacMillan later recalled, it was a difficult struggle that produced a strong local: “A union that has never had a struggle doesn’t create the leaders who come out of a struggle.”\textsuperscript{44}

These kinds of local breakthroughs were taking place across the province, and by 1964 the Canadian Union of Public Employees, created by a
merger of two older organizations in 1963, had thirty-nine locals in New Brunswick. They represented 2,500 public employees who had received certification and signed collective agreements with local governments, hospitals, and school boards.45 The future status of these workers was complicated by the reorganization of public services recommended by the Robichaud government’s Byrne Commission in 1964. After more than three years of study, the report recommended sweeping changes that would equalize the tax burden across the province and establish common standards in health, education, and other public services. For New Brunswick workers, there was much to welcome in the Byrne Report. However, as Whitebone pointed out at the 1964 convention, the most significant omission was that almost nothing was said about the place of the workers and their unions in this revolution in provincial administration. It was estimated that some 20,000 workers employed by municipalities, school boards, and hospital commissions would now become employees of the provincial government. Since the Labour Relations Act did not recognize civil servants as “employees” within the meaning of the law, their status as workers with union contracts and rights was uncertain. Would they now lose their right to be recognized as union members?46

These questions coincided with the Federation’s need to choose a successor to President Whitebone at the 1964 convention. There were three candidates, but when the votes were counted, delegates had chosen the organizer who was closely associated with the cause of public employees, John Francis MacMillan — commonly known as “Lofty” due to the height that allowed him to tower over most of his fellows.47 A Cape Bretoner who was born in the coal-mining town of Port Hood in Nova Scotia’s Inverness County in 1917, he had left school at sixteen and gone into the mines, where he joined his first union in 1934. Soon afterwards he was attending an international convention of the United Mine Workers of America, where he was presented to the legendary president John L. Lewis as the youngest delegate in attendance. MacMillan went into the navy during the Second World War, serving as a stoker on harbour patrol vessels in Halifax and Saint John. When he was discharged in

“The New Unionism” 123
Saint John at the end of the war, he joined the police force. By 1947, he was president of the Saint John Policemen’s Protective Association, whose history went back to its original charter from the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada in 1919. When the National Union of Public Employees was organized in 1955, the union joined as Local 61. MacMillan later became the NUPE representative in Saint John and then regional director for the Canadian Union of Public Employees.48

As Federation president, MacMillan’s most urgent mission was to protect the interests of public employees in the ongoing changes in provincial administration. At the 1964 convention, Alexandre Boudreau, a member of the Byrne Commission who was also Director of Extension at the Université de Moncton, told delegates that “it might have been an oversight” on the part of the commission not to safeguard the rights of labour: “Perhaps it was an exaggerated confidence in the intelligence of our political leaders, I didn’t feel we had to.”49 MacMillan knew that labour could not make such assumptions. Existing rights needed to be protected, but MacMillan also recognized that this was a strategic moment of opportunity to secure union rights for all public employees who had been repeatedly denied it in the past. The Federation had supported this principle for many decades. As early as 1919, it was asserted in the Federation’s Reconstruction Programme, and Whitebone defended the same principle when the province’s collective bargaining legislation was enacted in the 1930s and 1940s.
Under MacMillan’s watch, the campaign continued. At the 1965 convention in Moncton, delegates voted unanimously to call for bargaining rights for all provincial civil servants, including those working for provincial boards and commissions. CLC President Claude Jodoin was in attendance to state that governments, regardless of party, should not lag behind but set an example in providing rights for their employees. A strange situation at the New Brunswick Liquor Commission was discussed in detail. The province had earlier agreed to declare the Liquor Control Board an “employer,” but when store clerks and warehouse workers applied for certification, they were rejected by the Labour Relations Board on the grounds that the “employer,” under revised legislation, now had a different name. As a result, the workers still had no rights. Also, one employee explained, managers were asking workers to sign a form letter undertaking not to join CUPE Local 963: “You know, nobody can be dictated to, in New Brunswick. They have been, but if we follow it up, I don’t think that we can be dictated to.” MacMillan drew an unfavourable comparison when he claimed that civil servants in emerging economies in east Africa had more union rights than workers in New Brunswick: “We should be taking some of the people in the Civil Service and sending them to Tanganyika and Kenya in order to learn what the trade union movement has done in those countries.” He also expressed confidence that the desired reforms would be achieved: “It has been a long hard fight to get those benefits for the civil servants, and it will be a little longer. But we will get them.”

The agitation lasted another two years. “We had rallies all over the province. These included the civil servants, the secretaries, clerical workers, liquor store workers, highway workers, public works, forest rangers, the general broad scope of public employees,” recalled MacMillan. “We also had a policy of getting to the local MLAs. We kept on the backs of them all the time. We figured you’re not going to get the legislation passed, if you just present briefs to the cabinet.” The unions kept a close watch on legislative reforms and took every opportunity to advance their case. MacMillan has recalled that, when the school boards were being reorganized, he had to stop the minister of education in the lobby of the Lord Beaverbrook Hotel to
show him the amendments needed to maintain union contracts in the new school districts. Another ad hoc adjustment in 1967 forced the province to amend the Civil Service Act to end the prohibition on the employment of married women, which was considered acceptable at the municipal level but had been prohibited under provincial law. A select committee of the legislature was named to study changes to the Labour Relations Act, and the Federation and CUPE submitted briefs, as did the Civil Service Association of New Brunswick, the New Brunswick Association of Registered Nurses, and the New Brunswick Teachers’ Federation. However, meetings were few and far between and progress was slow. MacMillan feared that many of the Federation’s suggestions were being ignored.

Then, in June 1966, Premier Robichaud appointed a one-man royal commission to provide advice. This was a turning point. Union leaders were aware that the selected McGill University specialist in industrial relations, Saul
Frankel, would write a positive report with a practical plan for implementing collective bargaining in the public service. In supporting this appointment, Robichaud’s principal advisor on the issue, the former Saskatchewan civil servant Donald Tansley, reassured the premier that civil servants in Saskatchewan (where Tansley had worked for the CCF government) had enjoyed normal union rights since 1945.54

The Federation and CUPE, as well as the teachers, the nurses, and the Civil Service Association, all participated in hearings in August and September 1966, and when the report was released in July 1967, there were no surprises. The recommendations outlined a plan for the extension of union rights to all provincial employees and proceeded from the general principle that collective bargaining had become an accepted feature of the democratic way of life:

Collective bargaining in one form or another is characteristic of the political process in a society that allows its members a wide area of freedom. Men have interests that they seek to satisfy, and they tend to form themselves into groups or associations based on common interests in order to compete more effectively for a share of the goods and values available in a given society. Because these goods and values are relatively scarce in relation to the demand for them, the competition sometimes generates tension and conflict. If democratic societies are viable and enduring it is not because they seek to suppress this competition, but because they succeed in developing institutions and procedures that help to reconcile differences and provide ways of resolving disputes.55

On the basis of these recommendations, a Public Service Labour Relations Act was announced in the Speech from the Throne in February 1968. When he introduced the bill, Minister of Labour H. H. Williamson stated that the purpose was to give employees of the government the same rights as other workers in the province. This would allow for a “planned and professional approach” to labour relations in which basic principles of due process and fair treatment would prevail: “All public service employees will be treated
equitably, both in relation to each other and to the community.” This would also serve to promote “a public service which has the best possible employees with a high morale because they are working under conditions which they themselves have had a part in creating.”

In detail, the new act resembled the Labour Relations Act and was in effect a parallel constitution for the conduct of labour relations in the public sector. The new law covered some 25,000 to 30,000 workers — including those working for departments, commissions, school districts, and hospital boards. Where union contracts already existed, these would continue in force, but the act was a new opportunity for many workers who had only recently become provincial employees when the province assumed responsibility for the hospitals in 1966, and for the schools in 1967. Workers who wanted to join unions would now have the right to do so and to negotiate with their employer — which was defined as the province’s Treasury Board. A separate Public Service Labour Relations Board was created to grant certifications. The negotiation of province-wide agreements was an important consequence, as it guaranteed that standards would apply to all workers covered under a contract, and this would do much to reduce internal regional disparities within the province. One important provision in the act was the result of a conversation between MacMillan and Robichaud. When the premier said he did not want to see picket lines in front of public buildings in the event of a strike, MacMillan replied that the only way to achieve this would be to prohibit the use of strikebreakers. As a result, section 102 included a restriction on picketing during strikes and a prohibition on the use of strikebreakers.

When the bill received final reading in December 1968, the ground had been well prepared, and Robichaud pronounced the legislation “long overdue.” Although public service collective bargaining was not one of the original objectives of Equal Opportunity, Robichaud recognized that it was among the most important achievements of his government. What he failed to state more explicitly was that the enactment of this reform was made possible by New Brunswick workers who organized themselves into unions and insisted on their rights, thus forcing the government to introduce measures.
that it did not originally foresee undertaking. Besides the workers who were affiliated to the Federation of Labour through their unions, other workers in the public sector would also have new opportunities. In the case of the nurses and teachers, for instance, their exclusion from the provisions of the Labour Relations Act was in effect reversed by the new law in 1968 and the subsequent changes that produced a new Industrial Relations Act in 1971. Many years in the making, the enactment of the Public Service Labour Relations Act was a major success for the Federation. As MacMillan later recalled, “That era changed the face of the province of New Brunswick.”

**Development and Underdevelopment**

While public employees were gaining ground throughout the province, the most concentrated geographic zone of new union activity in the 1960s was in northern New Brunswick. The huge local deposits of lead, zinc, and silver had been known since the early 1950s, when these strategic raw materials attracted the attention of the American government and multinational corporations. Further development of this resource, with the condition that processing of the ores be carried out in the province, was one of the biggest ambitions of the Robichaud government. When he announced plans for a $50 million industrial complex in 1961, Robichaud predicted thousands of new jobs. Once Brunswick Mining and Smelting began operations, the area surrounding Bathurst entered a boom period. Bathurst was incorporated as a city, and the population rose from fewer than 5,500 people in 1961 to three times that by the end of the decade. At the peak of expansion in the mid-1960s, there were as many as 1,500 jobs for workers constructing the facilities, and another 2,500 or more in the mining and smelter operations. Robichaud supported the expansion of these operations through a series of provincial guarantees and tax concessions. He had also recruited K. C. Irving as a major investor to reduce American control and later brought in Noranda Mines to undercut Irving’s influence. By 1970, the province was producing more than 500 million tons of ore per year, with an annual value of $90 million.
The need for strong union representation in this sector was apparent from the start. Already, in the summer of 1965, there was trouble among construction workers at the Belledune smelter and Brunswick mine sites. Members of an independent labourers’ union were bargaining with one of the contractors to establish an eight-hour day and a five-day week (they were working 9.5 hours, five days one week and six the next) and to win rates of $1.60 an hour (in place of $1.32). When the province failed to appoint a conciliation board, 350 labourers went on strike at the end of August. Operations came to a halt as another 800 carpenters, millwrights, electricians, welders, riggers, pipefitters, plumbers, bricklayers, and others refused to cross the picket lines. One man was injured by a truck loaded with a bulldozer belonging to Irving Equipment when it crossed the line at Belledune, and two men spent a night in jail after they were charged with intimidation on the picket line. The next day a judge granted an injunction to prohibit picketing. Meanwhile, the RCMP was patrolling the sites, and union spokesman Réjean Charlebois was considering a call for a general strike. After seven days, the strike ended in a stalemate and negotiations resumed, but labour relations remained tense.

There would be another four work stoppages at the Belledune site over the next year and several at the Brunswick mine as well. Many of these were wildcat strikes, not authorized by the unions but provoked by workplace grievances such as the dismissal of individual workers or the failure to remove unpopular supervisors. A notable feature of these strikes was the solidarity between workers belonging to different unions, when electricians, plumbers, carpenters, bricklayers, and other trades refused to cross picket lines. When Charlebois spoke at the Federation convention in September, he appealed for support in a common cause: “We’ve got to fight that battle, and I’m asking your financial support and your prayers to beat the big lion. And if we beat him, this will be good for you people, for your children going to school right now, and for all the future of New Brunswick. But if we get beat once more now, we’ll stay with the low wages another 15 to 20 years. We’ll never pick up with the par of the country.”

130 PROVINCIAL SOLIDARITIES
The most important union to emerge from the mining boom in the north was the United Steelworkers of America, one of the pioneer industrial unions representing hard rock miners and smelter workers in Canada. In 1965 they sent an experienced organizer to staff the Local 5385 office on St. George Street in Bathurst. Born in 1926 at Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, another blue-collar town that depended on forest and mining operations, Paul LePage had worked at the Algoma steel plant for eighteen years and had held several posts on the local union executive. It was also important that he came from a francophone family, which gave the union a much-needed bilingual presence in northern New Brunswick in the 1960s.
New Brunswick. As one of the first graduates of the union-sponsored Labour College of Canada in 1963, LePage belonged to a new generation of working-class leaders who were familiar with the complexities of the modern industrial relations system as well as those of internal union politics. In dealing with disputes, LePage was considered a “good negotiator” and a “straight shooter” who regarded a properly enforced collective agreement as the best guarantee of good relations with employers. LePage’s abilities, as well as the importance of developments in the Bathurst area, were both recognized when he joined the Federation executive as vice-president for Gloucester.  

By the time of the 1967 convention, Lofty MacMillan had taken on his next challenge. It was hardly a retirement. His appointment as director of organization for CUPE was recognition of MacMillan’s talent as an organizer, and over the course of the next decade, he would help to make CUPE the largest union in Canada. He was sent on his way to Ottawa with thanks for his “untiring efforts on behalf of the working man” and with the hope that “he will not forget that he comes from the Maritime Provinces.” Meanwhile, the Federation needed a new president. Stalwarts Frank Crilley of Saint John and Aurèle Ferlatte of Dalhousie were nominated, but they stood aside in order to support the election of LePage. Although LePage was less polished in style than Whitebone and not as dynamic a speaker as MacMillan, the delegates were choosing an experienced organizer and administrator committed to building the Federation and expanding the influence of the unions.

When the 1968 convention was called to order at the Collège de Bathurst a year later, LePage was able to tell delegates that the Federation was in good condition and that numbers were continuing to rise: “Unions are here to stay, and this the employers must recognize. When all employers recognize this, we will increase our productivity, have better wages, better conditions of employment, and more labour stability in our province.” One of his first priorities, however, was to keep up the pressure for the province to participate in the medicare programme for hospital and physician services enacted by the federal government in 1968. This issue was of special interest to LePage, who had been one of the founders of a union-supported group health centre
in Sault Ste. Marie. Under the leadership of the CLC, the provincial labour federations were among the most vocal supporters of the full universal programme that was recommended by the royal commission headed by Justice Emmett Hall in 1964. On the evening prior to the opening of the 1968 convention, the issue was pushed to the fore when speakers for the provincial Liberals, Progressive Conservatives, and New Democratic Party were invited to explain their positions. Like other labour groups, the Federation was disappointed that all of Justice Hall’s recommendations were not accepted by the federal government, but it continued to lobby for prompt action to meet national standards. When the province’s Medical Services Payment Act was adopted in December 1968, the Federation had done its part to ensure that New Brunswickers would benefit from one of the major social reforms in Canadian history.64

Meanwhile, in a political landscape where the provincial government seemed to be pursuing moderately social democratic policies, the New Democratic Party was not gaining traction. The provincial CCF had dissolved in favour of the NDP in December 1962, but the new party attracted little support during the Robichaud years and only a handful of unions took out formal affiliation. By 1970, there was a renewal of interest among labour supporters. The leadership was taken on by a youthful union activist from the Miramichi, J. Albert Richardson, who had worked in the mines in New Brunswick and Manitoba and was now a representative for the Canadian Food and Allied Workers. The election campaign that followed in October 1970 included public ownership of the forest industry and telephone system, the adoption of public auto insurance, and the creation of 50,000 new jobs. However, the results were disappointing. The Robichaud government was replaced by the Progressive Conservatives under Richard Hatfield, and the NDP’s thirty-one candidates received less than 3 percent of the vote.

The party was also facing claims that its programme was too conservative for the times, a challenge similar to that issued to the federal NDP by the “Waffle” movement for “an independent socialist Canada.” At a provincial party convention in Saint John in September 1971, a group known as

“The New Unionism” 133
the New Brunswick Waffle proposed adoption of a manifesto under the title “For a Socialist New Brunswick.” Few labour leaders in the province were prepared for this highly charged critique of New Brunswick capitalism or for the claim that the achievement of limited reforms served only to “reinforce basic power relationships” within the capitalist system. Much to the surprise of many Waffle supporters themselves, however, the convention voted by a one-vote margin to endorse the manifesto. Several labour delegates immediately walked out. During the period of internal crisis that followed, prominent labour leaders, including LePage, urged the federal NDP to intervene. Party leader David Lewis, who had won the leadership against a surprisingly strong bid by Waffle leader James Laxer, was happy to do so. By November, a special convention had reaffirmed Richardson’s leadership, and the Waffle group soon broke up in disarray.65

In the short run, this internal conflict did little to strengthen the NDP in the province, but there were efforts at the Federation’s 1972 convention to renew support for the party. An extended two-page resolution, introduced by a Moncton local of the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway, Transport and General Workers, stated that “alternating between a Liberal Administration and a Conservative Administration for the past one hundred years has produced nothing but economic chaos and social unrest” and that it was time to “bring about in the Province of New Brunswick a government responsible to the needs of the working people.” Delegates, labour councils, and affiliates were invited to affirm their support for “a broadly based political party which was committed to the principles of social and economic justice for all and special privilege for none.” The NDP was described as the party that “consistently supports labour’s legislative objectives,” and several themes were listed: “Canadian control of our economic affairs — full employment — protection of our environment — more emphasis on the quality of life — better social security — human rights and improved health services — low cost auto insurance — and recognition of the right of senior citizens to enjoy their twilight years in dignity, comfort and security.” As in the original debate on support for the NDP a decade earlier, however, it was
recognized that some union members were committed by their union constitutions or by provincial legislation to “a non-political role” and that their independence must be respected. The resolution provoked a lively debate and carried on a standing vote.66

Certainly, the old problems of underdevelopment and regional disparity had not disappeared by the early 1970s. The situation was especially alarming in northern New Brunswick, where the boom of the previous decade was coming to an end. In late 1971, there were widespread layoffs, including shutdowns in the paper mills, mining operations, and fish plants. This, in turn, was drawing the whole north into a severe downturn, and there was concern that governments were shifting their attention to growth centres such as Moncton and Saint John. The Federation launched a campaign of protest in December, and local unions in Gloucester, Restigouche, Madawaska, and Northumberland appealed to the province for a moratorium on layoffs. They also called on the federal government to designate northern New Brunswick as a special area for assistance from the Department of Regional Economic Expansion. The Federation’s efforts focused on a massive public demonstration in January. A veteran Mine-Mill organizer, Ray Stevenson, was assigned to coordinate a Day of Concern in Bathurst. The plan was to build a local common front through a Citizens Coordinating Committee, co-chaired by Federation vice-president Eric Pitre of Bathurst and lawyer Frederick Arsenault of the...
Gloucester County Barristers Society. On Thursday, 13 January, a free public concert—“Songfest of Folk and Union Songs,” also advertised under the heading “Chantons notre amitié”—aimed to “tune up” the community for the event. The show featured the star Acadian folksinger Edith Butler, who interrupted a tour of the United States in order to participate, and labour troubadour Perry Friedman, who was supplied by the steelworkers union. Local artists Calixte Duguay, Jacques Savoie, the Ward Sisters, and Derek Knowles also performed.67

On the cold early Sunday afternoon of 16 January, thousands of marchers assembled on the downtown boulevard and nearby streets. At 1 p.m., with Bathurst Police Chief J.J. O’Neil as parade marshal they proceeded across the causeway, led by Canadian and New Brunswick flags and a band of drummers.

COMMON FRONT On 16 January 1972, the Day of Concern in Bathurst protested the failures of economic development in northern New Brunswick. Thousands of marchers proceeded across the harbour causeway, led by Canadian and New Brunswick flags and a band of drummers. The mobilization attracted national attention. Source: Centre d’études acadiennes Anselme-Chiasson, E-16014.
Three of the seven sections in the line of march were filled by union members; others included public officials, clergy and religious orders, chambers of commerce and professional groups, firemen and police, and community organizations ranging from the long-established Knights of Columbus to the much newer militants of the Conseil régional d’aménagement du Nord-Est (CRAN). At the Collège de Bathurst, people crowded into the gymnasium while others listened on loudspeakers in other halls. The proceedings were also broadcast on a local radio station, CKBC. Dozens of union leaders and public figures sat on the stage, including presidents of local unions, officers of the Federation, and representatives from the national offices of the steelworkers, machinists, paperworkers, and the CLC. The organizers had also succeeded in attracting major political figures to attend. Premier Hatfield was there with most of his cabinet, and so too were the leaders of the provincial Liberal and New Democratic parties. Among the federal politicians were NDP leader David Lewis, Progressive Conservative leader Robert Stanfield, and Jean Marchand, the former Québec union leader who was now minister of regional economic expansion as well as one of Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau’s closest colleagues. Estimates of the crowds ranged as high as 10,000 in number, and LePage later described the event as “the largest undertaking ever taken by our Federation.”

LePage gave the first major speech, stating that this was not just a “narrow sectional” union protest but one that involved “every section of our community” in addressing “the shattering effects of economic stagnation and crisis upon every section of the communities, our region and our entire province and people.” The forest industries, he charged, had been allowed to slide into inefficiency while subsidies supported new plants elsewhere; and the mining industry was failing to develop the smelting and refining capacity needed for long-term development. LePage demanded that public assistance to the resource industries be protected by giving the Canadian taxpayers dollar-for-dollar equity in ownership and profits. In short, this was “public investment on the basis of protected equity for the Canadian people,” and he argued that there was nothing unprecedented in such government intervention,
which had been taking place since the days of John A. Macdonald’s National Policy and was continued when public funds were used to build up industry during the Second World War. At last it was time to recognize the same urgency in developing the mining and forest resources of New Brunswick: “The regional disparities and inequalities that exist, and we in New Brunswick and in the Atlantic provinces know the results of this in our bones from bitter experience, are the result of national policies that have maintained these disparities. It IS time for a New Deal from Ottawa and it is this new deal we are proposing.” LePage ended by referring to the promise of $10 million in emergency aid announced by Marchand and Hatfield a few days earlier and warned: “When a person has a broken leg, you do not put a bandaid on it to cure it. I hope I will be forgiven if I use the language we sometimes hear at the bargaining table when a company has made an initial and limited offer: ‘well that’s fine . . . you have recognized the justness of our proposals . . . but let’s really get down to brass tacks and have a look at what is really in that bag you have there.’”

For many in the crowd, however, the most memorable speeches were the ones that were interrupted. When NDP leader David Lewis spoke, encouraging workers to take political action, he did so only in English and there were cries of “En français! En français!” Premier Hatfield received the same treatment, and as other speakers took their turn, there was a rising chant of “On veut Mathilda!” Mathilda Blanchard (the local union leader was assigned a seat on stage but arrived from the back of the hall) was invited to address the crowd. Pointing her finger at Marchand, Blanchard denounced Ottawa’s modernization programmes for favouring growth centres in the south and ruining the resources of the north. She also called for nationalization of the mines, pulp mills, and fishing industry and warned that “union leaders do not necessarily speak for the workers.” Marchand had the last word, speaking rapidly and entirely in French. His message was that he had no “foolish promises” and that the federal government would continue to use its established regional development policies to find lasting solutions to the unemployment problem.
REGIONAL DISPARITY  Federation President Paul LePage delivered one of the major addresses at the 1972 Day of Concern, appealing for more responsible development policies: “The regional disparities and inequalities that exist, and we in New Brunswick and in the Atlantic provinces know the results of this in our bones from bitter experience, are the result of national policies that have maintained these disparities. It IS time for a New Deal from Ottawa.” Source: Centre d’études acadiennes Anselme-Chiasson, e-16016.
Those were frustrating answers, and so too were the apparent divisions within the Federation's carefully constructed common front. The language of anti-corporate populism, as articulated by LePage and Lewis, was not enough for the occasion. The discontent, especially among a generation of students and youth facing an uncertain future in their home region, was accelerated by the growth of Acadian nationalism, which a few weeks later resulted in the founding of the Parti Acadien. For all their dedication to holding governments to account, the Federation of Labour in this context seemed to be, as Richard Wilbur later put it, a “conservative-minded” force.\textsuperscript{71}

In the weeks after the Day of Concern there was continued agitation, as the high number of unemployment claims and the centralization of administration in Moncton caused delays in the processing of files. In February, a group of unemployed workers occupied the Unemployment Insurance Commission offices in Bathurst and on the second day of their sit-in were joined by students. Police ejected them all from the building, and thirteen people were arrested. In another protest, demonstrators threw rocks and mud, and broke doors. In collaboration with the labour council and the CLC, the Federation opened an office to assist workers with their claims and to convince the Unemployment Insurance Commission to introduce emergency measures to speed up the processing of files. Commenting on the involvement of students and other young activists over the previous weeks, LePage expressed his anxieties in these terms: “Our concern lies in the fact that college students form part of a moving population which disperses following graduation leaving the results of their radicalism to be resolved by workers’ organizations. Problems facing workers must be resolved through utilizing the strength and resources of the trade union movement; community problems require joint efforts but the action must take place within a structured framework acceptable to all participants.”\textsuperscript{72}
Looking Forward

In the wake of episodes such as the New Brunswick Waffle and the Day of Concern, the Federation leaders continued to look for ways to balance the demands of militancy in support of their members while also maintaining influence with the provincial government. As in the working alliance between MacMillan and Robichaud in the 1960s, LePage enjoyed a cordial relationship with Premier Hatfield, whom he recognized as a “Progressive” within the limits of Progressive Conservative party traditions. The Federation continued to insist on its right to name labour representatives to provincial bodies and enjoyed influence through appointees to the New Brunswick Safety Council, the Public Service Labour Relations Board, the Industrial Relations Board, the Employment Standards Advisory Board, the Human Rights Commission, and the New Brunswick Research and Productivity Council, among others. In 1973, LePage reported that the Industrial Relations Board, under University of New Brunswick Dean of Law George McAllister, was following “a very enlightened approach towards labour relations problems in the Province.”

Two years later LePage was less satisfied, noting an increase in challenges to the certification of unions, which he described as a form of “adversary legalism”: “Not only have certain lawyers in the Province continually offered their services to management as reputed union busters and constantly appeared before the Board in this capacity in opposition to applications for certification, but the same element have made it a practice to encourage management to appeal Board certification orders to the Supreme Court of New Brunswick.” Nonetheless, the status of the Federation was at a high level, said LePage, and their message was clear and consistent: “Organized labour through collective action simply seeks a fairer redistribution of the benefits of increased productivity, protection against the adverse effects of inflation, a better working environment and improved social and economic conditions for all workers, whether organized or unorganized, active or retired.” When a spokesman for the Department of Labour stated that labour unrest in the province had reached unusually high levels during the past year and that many of the strikes were illegal walkouts, LePage had nothing reassuring to say.
Instead of discussing “man-days lost,” he replied, the Department of Labour should consider measuring strikes in terms of “loss of income” by the workers. He also added: “We are not a bunch of strike-happy wing-dings, but when we have an ever-increasing cost of living, we have had to take action.”

The Federation did not hold a regular convention in 1974, and there were more than enough issues to consider in 1975, including a set of four major policy statements on food prices, housing, pensions, and wages and incomes. There was also a heated debate on support for a provincial takeover of the New Brunswick Telephone Company, on the grounds that such a profitable monopoly should benefit the people of the province. Delegates repeated their support for public automobile insurance and called on the province to take over the operation of private nursing homes as well. A resolution from the Newcastle-Chatham and District Labour Council proposed that the province take over control of the resource industries — “and the profits derived from these resources be used for the benefit of the people”; however, this wording was set aside by the executive and replaced by the more moderate demand that the government “more effectively control the Province’s natural resources to ensure we derive maximum economic and social benefit.”

On some issues, delegates were especially cautious. They voted against a resolution to support the right of women to seek an abortion, and a resolution opposing capital punishment was referred back for amendment, with the majority later voting in favour of life imprisonment without parole for convicted murderers. There was a resolution supporting identification cards for the purchase of liquor, adopted after delegates heard an account of a Liquor Commission employee convicted of selling liquor to a minor. The use of ex
parte court orders in labour disputes was again denounced as “government by injunction,” and Premier Hatfield and other members of the legislature were condemned for staying at the Lord Beaverbrook Hotel while a strike was in progress there. There was also a debate over a letter sent by the Federation executive to a veteran union man who lost his leg in an industrial accident at the paper mill in Saint John. He had been asked to refrain from further public criticism of the Workmen’s Compensation Board; the issue, brought to the floor by paperworkers delegate Larry Hanley (it was his father’s case), was referred to the CLC ombudsman. At the end of the convention, one reporter in attendance summed up the busy hum of activity, calculating that by the third day the 341 registered voting delegates had faced more than 160 resolutions as well as the four policy statements, nineteen documents, and numerous other reports, speeches, and debates. The microphones in the Grand Salon of the Hotel Beauséjour were always busy: “There were harangues and pleas, threats and conciliatory remarks, words that provoked outbursts of applause and words that were forgotten before the speaker could say them.”

For many delegates, the most notable event at the 1975 convention was the visit of César Chávez, the charismatic American union leader who was appealing to Canadians to boycott California grapes and lettuce. When Chávez was introduced, he received a standing ovation and was accompanied by rhythmic clapping as he came to the podium. “How many of you take a union for granted?” he asked. “How many of our brothers and sisters in this convention take the idea of having a union for granted?” In a short speech, he told delegates that the farm workers had been fighting for a union for more than fifty years and that the United Farm Workers were at last having some success. Recent changes in state law were at last making it possible for farm workers to secure recognition of their union; they had survived Richard Nixon in Washington and Ronald Reagan in California, he said, “and now we are on the verge of winning.”

They were also winning thanks to international support for their boycott, especially in Canada. They were stopping sales in Ontario and Québec, and Chávez explained that it was important to stop Dominion Stores, the only
major distributor that had failed to respect the boycott, from dumping surplus produce in places such as New Brunswick. Following his speech, Chávez led the delegates and other supporters on a march down the road to Champlain Place in Dieppe, where they gathered in front of the Dominion store with placards reading “Viva la causa!” and “Boycott Grapes!” Together with LePage, Chávez was invited to meet with the store manager, who explained he had no authority to change store policy but would phone Toronto to report the situation. “I’ve picketed more Dominion stores than I can count but this is the first time I’ve ever been inside one,” Chávez said afterwards. He added that he was pleased with the demonstration of support and was also amused by the cooperation of local police during his visit: “When I return home and tell them I had a police escort from the airport, they’ll never believe me.”

The visit by an international figure such as Chávez helped delegates understand that they were participants in a larger struggle for social justice that reached well beyond their own borders. In his own way, Chávez was also helping New Brunswick union members understand how much they had already accomplished in their own province. By 1975 much had happened to strengthen the place of labour in New Brunswick. The total number of union members had tripled since the early 1950s, and these gains had taken place among blue-collar and white-collar workers, in both private and public sectors. Although union membership was still predominantly male, rapid changes were taking place: women made up 19 percent of union members in 1970 and 27 percent five years later. Moreover, by 1975 almost one in three workers in the province were members of unions. The Federation itself was also gaining strength. Secretary-Treasurer Alvin Blakely reported a total of 268 affiliated locals, of which thirty had joined since the previous convention. More than half the delegates were from Moncton and Saint John, but there were more than twenty-five communities represented in all, and the number of women delegates and francophones had also increased significantly. There was room for more members, and Blakely did not hesitate to point out that some eligible locals in the public service and railway and building trades had not affiliated. The merger of the rival federations could be counted a success,
and the Federation could claim accurately to represent the majority of union members in the province. With 44,545 affiliated members, the Federation was larger than ever before and so too was its influence. In the years ahead it would be important to remember that this new level of unionization was achieved through a long history of efforts by countless men and women whose names are rarely prominent in the historical record. At the 1975 convention, one veteran local member recalled his own history as an “agitator” and “organizer” over more than fifty years. Bill Touchie was seventy-eight years old and had started work in the Miramichi woods at the age of thirteen. After fighting in the Great War, he joined the ranks of several successive unions, including the One Big Union, the New Brunswick Farmer-Labour Union, the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners, and the Union of National Defence Employees. During his lifetime, he said, he had helped to organize thirty-seven different union locals, and if he was twenty-five years younger, he would do it all again: “Not to start a revolution, but to stir things up a little.” When he called a meeting, he explained, it was best to begin with a simple appeal: “‘Come here brothers and sisters, there’s something here that just isn’t right.’ And then I’d tell them to sign up for the union. I’d like to do that until my last breath.”
THE BIG CHILL  The climate for workers changed after 1975 as governments and employers turned to policies that undermined union rights and labour standards. The unions were often out in the cold, but the Federation continued to promote alternatives to the corporate agenda, defend workers’ rights, and support the cause of social justice within provincial society. Source: Telegraph-Journal Archives.