I. Introduction

No topic in Canadian labour history has elicited more debate than the Winnipeg General Strike of May-June, 1919. Viewed by most historians as a watershed in the development of labour and socialist politics, as well as in the development of state policies dealing with labour unrest and potential revolutionary threats to Canadian capital, the events of 1919 have provided the material for numerous studies of the strike itself, the rise of the One Big Union (OBU), and of repressive state policies, particularly the reaction of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and its attendant security system. In recent years the historiography of the strike has taken on a decidedly revisionist tone, with the majority of writers subscribing to an analysis which stresses the national rather than local significance of these events. New studies of labour and socialist movements in the Maritimes, for example, have suggested that 1919 did not remain a western phenomenon alone. A recent study of Montreal reveals a working class offensive in 1919 which built on earlier discontents; while not strictly a 'general strike', the author demonstrates that important labour and socialist strengths existed in the city and that a militant faction of the labour movement supported the OBU despite disavowals by the moderate trade union leadership. Recent work on Toronto has also shown that Toronto's failed general strike cannot be dismissed as insignificant in the context of developing labour and socialist politics. As in other Canadian cities, the events of 1919 split the labour movement and in Toronto, the moderates were ousted from the Trades and Labor Council as a result. These studies, and others, have suggested that the events of 1919 were indicative of widespread class conflict if not potential revolution.¹

While many of the revisionist accounts point out the importance for growing labour unrest of the trend toward organizing sectors previously unorganized, or at least weakly organized, none of these accounts adequately discuss or explain the participation of women in the events
surrounding the Winnipeg General Strike and its counterparts in other Canadian centres. One recent essay on women's roles in the Winnipeg events provides a close look at that city, but no wider analysis has yet appeared. This paper will examine the general strike wave in the spring/summer of 1919 in several centres across Canada, specifically focusing on women's activism in a broad sense; some women activists were recognized as leadership figures, but most of women's active participation emerged in the various strikes which formed the building blocks of the general strike movement. The surge of organization and unrest which culminated in 1919 built upon the more general interest and momentum stemming from wartime conditions and opportunities which women also shared in. The general strike phenomenon, then, for women as for men, demonstrated class conflict and considerable unrest, heightened by the effects of a boom and bust cycle associated with war.

When the Royal Commission on Industrial Relations (known as the Mathers Commission) made its tour of Canadian cities between April and June 1919, 14 women appeared to testify as to the causes of industrial unrest at the moment when conflict reached its peak. Despite their varied backgrounds, these women's testimony agreed that the high cost of living, low wages, insecurity of employment and bad housing conditions contributed to the general malaise; some spoke up directly on the subject of women's exploitation in the wage labour market, citing instances from their own experiences. Many of them traced the current turbulence to wartime conditions and the lack of business and government response to the plight of the working class, caught in a worsening situation. Such testimony gives a partial glimpse into the lives of women engaged in waged work and those who tried to maintain families on their husband's insufficient wages or meager military pensions. Labour and socialist women had been particularly active in 1917 and 1918 organizing previously unorganized women into unions, Women's Labor Leagues and soldier's wives' organizations. This activity continued in the immediate post-war period and 1919 witnessed an intensification of the trend. As the demand for women in retail, clerical and service jobs expanded, union activists, female and sometimes male, turned their attention toward women workers and unskilled workers generally. Whether the vehicle was existing American Federation of Labor 'international' unions, directly chartered federal labour unions, independent unions, or the One Big Union (OBU), the general trend was to reach out to the previously unorganized, a trend which peaked during the labour strife of 1919.

This paper chronicles hitherto invisible militancy among women in the labour and socialist movements, mainly during the labour revolt of 1919, but it also addresses the aftermath later in 1919 and into 1920. The explicit intention here is not to recreate a militant 'golden past' for women activists but to suggest that the twin crises of the war period, the war itself and the state's defence of capitalism from labour militancy and socialism, mobilized
labour and socialist women as never before, to defend working-class interests which included protection of the working class family, women workers and the democratic rights of organization, free speech and collective bargaining. While women activists often subsumed their interests in broad labour or socialist concerns, the suffering of the war period, the high cost of living, the enfranchisement of women, the development of a deeply-felt concern for peace and the formation of women's groups among working-class women, often based in a local community, contributed to an increased awareness of gender and a growing consciousness of working-class women's connections to the arenas of public debate and action. For some women activists the next step was electoral politics; for others, the solution emerged in revolutionary groups. By and large this new awareness remained rooted in a maternalism shared by middle-class reformers and hampered by labour and socialist acceptance of the bread-winner family model. The growth of the female waged labour force and unionization of previously unorganized women, and the public sector, 1917–20, partially challenged labour and socialist notions that women and the unskilled generally were threatening and unorganizable, more conservative and unreliable. During the crisis of 1919, however, the state certainly viewed the increased militancy coming from unskilled women and immigrant workers as a threat requiring draconian measures. The rank-and-file revolt of the last years of the war and the early reconstruction period could not be controlled as easily as the moderate Trades and Labor Congress or its international union affiliates. Censorship, internment (mostly of men but also of some women), suppression of the press, and the attack on democratic rights prompted women to utilize their resources to defend themselves and families in whatever ways they could.4

This paper takes a detailed look at Winnipeg women's activism and touches briefly on the activities of women in Regina, Calgary, Montreal and Toronto. In line with recent writings on women's political discourse and culture, it suggests that working-class women activists defined 'political' activity in terms of family and community needs rather than in the sense of formal political institutions; their ideal of service and caring for community and family needs arose from women's lived experiences within the realm of social reproduction as well as within the realm of production. Thus women's mobilization in the early 20th century resulted in a mixture of political expressions, some of which have not been recognized and legitimized as 'political'. Labour and socialist women participated in recognized forms of labour and socialist politics, but also in some cases created their own organizations to suit their needs. While the political agenda of women's organizations usually complemented those of their working-class male counterparts, gender-based perceptions sometimes came to the fore, creating tension between class and gender. The war years
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and the labour revolt of 1919 highlighted growing activism among labour and socialist women and raised occasional conflicts.1

II. The Winnipeg General Strike

Winnipeg was the centre of the 1919 upheaval, brought on by a confrontation between the Metal Trades Council, consisting of six unions, and recalcitrant employers who refused to recognize or deal with the industrial union style Council; also involved in the dispute was the building trades council representing various construction unions. Like the metal shop owners, the builders refused to meet with the building trades council. The result was a general strike, supported by a referendum vote taken by the Winnipeg Trades and Labor Council of its member unions. Thus, on 15 May, at 7:00 a.m., 500 women telephone operators began the general sympathetic strike, by walking out four hours before the official starting point. The official reason for the strike was the fight for collective bargaining. Beyond this, however, the strike soon became a struggle for a 'living wage', a struggle in which women had good cause to be involved. In addition, the strike provided an impetus to organize women workers in pursuit of the goal of a living wage. Later, the arrests and trials of strike leaders would add another dimension to the conflict — the defence of workers against the heavy hand of state repression.6

The day after the strike commenced, the Toronto Globe reported 2,000 women among the 30,000 strikers in Winnipeg. The precision of this estimate is unverifiable, although reports of votes for the strike indicate that those trades in which women worked voted overwhelmingly in favour of the strike. In addition to the telephone operators, sectors with large numbers of women, such as the retail clerks, garment workers, waitresses, bookbinders and confectionery workers voted strongly in favour. Women workers, both organized and unorganized, were urged to support the strike, largely through the efforts of socialist Helen Armstrong who assumed a crucial role in organizing the women for the duration of the strike. Armstrong kept the Trades and Labor Council (TLC) informed of progress in organizing women during the early days of the strike and was arrested shortly after the strike began for disorderly conduct at the Canada Bread Company property. Described in the Toronto Star as "business manager of the Women's Unions," Armstrong was arrested several times in the course of the six week strike. She organized innumerable meetings for working women which aimed at organizing new unions and also served as information sessions and strategy-planning occasions. Another noteworthy accomplishment was the initiation and implementation of a dining-room to provide free meals for women strikers; men who used the facilities were expected to pay or donate what they could, thus recognizing the fact that women workers were paid less. The dining room opened on 24
May with the assistance of several men elected to help. The dining room operated on the basis of donations from individuals and organizations; Labor church services were a favourite source of funds. The Women's Labor League of Winnipeg provided the nucleus of support for the dining room; fund-raising was one of its key roles and the WLL authorized fund-raising events as well as collecting money from the Labor Church. The women on strike, however, also found it difficult to pay rent without an income and turned to the WLL and the Strike Committee for financial assistance. The Relief Committee helped to fund cash donations to women in need. Some citizens offered rooms to the women strikers and the YWCA decided to take in any woman, striker or not, who was in need. Clearly Armstrong's activities and those of the WLL were central to the well-being of women strikers.7

While the strike represented an opportunity to organize women workers, it also presented a chance to capitalize on existing grievances with employers. A strike of Bakery and Confectionery workers, for example, coincided with the general strike. These workers, mostly women and girls, struck because employers would not negotiate with them, thus denying the legitimacy of their union. While the strike began the day before the general walkout, more candy and confectionery workers went out on 15 May to support the demands of the strikers. Store clerks also quit work as part of the general strike, despite employer attempts to bribe them with a raise and subsequent strike-breaking efforts, all of which failed. In the latter case, the large firm of T. Eaton Company sent scab labour from Toronto, but railway workers prevented them from reaching Winnipeg. Earlier investigations of women's work in department stores had led to a Minimum Wage Board ruling on salaries and hours which had not been complied with by all employers, thus explaining in part why clerks participated in the strike. Helen Armstrong had organized clerks during the war and in May 1919 she pushed the union drive further by concentrating on women employees in the smaller stores of Winnipeg, reporting considerable success on 26 May when a large number of women clerks were added to the number of strikers.8

Service workers also struck in 1919, many of them waitresses employed in the numerous cafes around Winnipeg. A revitalized Cooks', Waiters' and Waitresses' union had been organized in 1914 before the outbreak of the war; the union had survived with considerable difficulty during the war and in the early days of 1919, efforts were renewed to attract new members, especially women. One day after the start of the general strike, it was reported to the TLC that the union had almost 100 percent of the restaurants organized, with full support for the general strike among its members. Despite this show of strength, a number of cafes locked out their workers, according to one report. Conditions for waitresses were akin to slave labour in many restaurants; evidence from men employed in six cafes showed that hours ranged from fourteen and a half to nine hours a day with
one to three days off per month for the grand sum of fifteen dollars per month, with deductions for laundry and tips to bus boys leaving women a total of nine dollars per month to spend. Despite the Minimum Wage Board's June order covering waitresses, reports from later in 1919 and 1920 indicate that employers got away with much lower rates than the mandated $12.50 per week minimum wage, often reducing the minimum by four dollars. Employers also continued to violate the restrictions on night work for women under eighteen. The union remained out after the end of the general strike on 25 June; the Tribune reported 1200 members of the union still out on 27 June with demands for a ten dollar minimum for the waitresses and fifteen dollars for the men, even though the Minimum Wage Board had already ordered a higher sum for the women. By early July most of the members had returned to work, although the larger restaurants were still hostile to the union. Shaken by the strike, the union was reorganized several times in the latter part of 1919.

Perhaps the most important group of women was the telephone operators whose reputation for militancy stemmed back to their successful strike in 1917 and their key role in the 1918 strike of civic workers. The telephone operators had organized in February 1917 with the help of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) and staged a three-hour walkout on 1 May 1917. The resulting investigatory board recommended wage increases and better hours and conditions. Thus in May 1918, when the civic workers of Winnipeg staged a strike, the operators played a crucial role in tying up the city; in May 1919, however, they recalled some of the errors made in the 1918 strike and forestalled their replacement by 'volunteers' by pulling all the fuses. Thus in the early days of the strike communications were curtailed within the city and with the rest of the country. The operators enthusiastically supported the strike through fund-raising events; within days, operators all over the province had joined the strike. This militancy across the province was remarkable, since in many small towns, there were only a few women employed as operators. The pressure on these women to return was intense and intimidating; some were informed that they would not be reinstated for their part in the general strike and others, from small centers, were replaced before the strike terminated. By the middle of June the Commissioner of Telephones announced that he had received 192 applications for permanent work; 43 of those hired were reinstated after signing a pledge not to participate in sympathetic strikes. Despite the operators' actions, they were not able to prevent the use of volunteers completely, nor were they able to insist on the reinstatement of former operators without loss of seniority. Doris Meakin, in IBEW representative, stated at the end of June that only half of the operators were back at work, without seniority, and that they were forced to work overtime to maintain service. She also noted that the women demanded a protest strike but no action had been taken by the union. Employer refusal to reinstate women workers in many trades
plagued those who had been looking after the women strikers; Helen Armstrong reported to the TLC in early July that she was unable to cope with all the demands for help and urged the TLC to employ a woman to help these desperate women who had been arrested for vagrancy or refused relief. A committee was appointed to secure reinstatement and raise relief funds. Despite these efforts, however, many women were not rehired.10

Women were militant participants in street actions during the general strike as well. Several weeks into the strike, newspapers began to report incidents which demonstrated the activities of women strike supporters. The Toronto Star noted the predominance of women and children in the crowds that gathered at the railroad shops to prevent men from going to work; the same story reported the hostility of crowds towards automobile drivers going into Winnipeg's working-class North End to pick up domestic help. In working class area such as Weston, women were observed pulling scab firemen out of the firehall and wrecking delivery trucks owned by local department stores. Three such trucks were destroyed with wheels and merchandise smashed; in addition, the women assaulted the drivers and special police trying to protect them. A few days later several women were charged with assaulting one of the drivers and eventually fined twenty dollars and costs. Others were charged with offenses such as intimidation of shop girls and disorderly conduct; for their part in the riot of ‘Bloody Saturday,’ several women were arrested for rioting and released on $1000 bail. The mayor had banned parades and warned: “Any women taking part in a parade do so at their own risk.”11

Strike leader Helen Armstrong faced several charges of inciting to disorder and counselling to commit an indictable offence when she appeared for trial in assize court. She was accused of telling girls on strike to take newspapers away from girls selling them on the street; the two young women, Ida Krantz and Margaret Steinhauer testified that they asked Armstrong’s permission to stop the selling of newspapers. The two received fines of five dollars and costs, but Helen Armstrong remained in jail for three days until bail was allowed after initially being refused by the judge. Armstrong was a feisty leader and clearly posed a threat to the authorities. George Armstrong, a prominent strike leader, was arrested along with other strike leaders a week before Helen was brought to trial; The Star’s special correspondent reported that when the officers came in the night to take George Armstrong away, Helen refused to let them take her husband until she ran to the North end police station to telephone the Chief of Police to check on the federal warrant for his arrest. Only then did she allow her husband to be taken away.12

The active and militant women of Winnipeg continued their activities after the strike finished. The repercussions of the six weeks of the general strike were felt into the summer and fall of 1919 as the trials were held. In August at the trial of some women picketers from working-class Weston, witness Fred Gouldie commented:
'He would rather face the Huns than the women of Weston.' He wanted to go to work at Eaton's, but they stopped him on the path and for nearly three weeks he did not try to pass their pickets. They were fierce — and then some. They didn't touch him but 'they were determined I shouldn't go to work.'

With the strike leaders still in jail, women helped to mount protests against their continued incarceration and the refusal to grant bail. On Labour Day in early September a giant protest parade filled the streets of Winnipeg with 7,000 protesters. The women's section, represented by the WLL, contributed two floats to the parade, one of them portraying the figures of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, certainly a pointed comment on the long incarceration of the strike leaders. A few days later, Helen Armstrong spoke to a mass meeting of women at the Winnipeg rink in which she announced WLL plans to present the visiting Prince of Wales with a petition for the release of the strike leaders. Winnipeg's chief of police threatened to prevent the WLL from parading in a body to greet the Prince of Wales, but this did not daunt Helen Armstrong who replied that the WLL would greet the Prince as private citizens, although she added that they would carry a few signs to protest the refusal to grant bail to the strike leaders. For unknown reasons the women decided not to proceed with the demonstration and a few days later the men were released on bail. When the strike trials began in late 1919 judicial authorities clearly revealed their attitudes towards women's militancy during the strike. Judge Metcalfe, in answer to defence arguments about undue force being used on crowds during the police charge on 'Bloody Saturday', responded with an unambiguous statement of policy towards the presence of women on the streets:

In these days when women are taking up special obligations and assuming equal privileges with men, it may be well for me to state now that women are just as liable to ill treatment in a riot as men and can claim no special protection and are entitled to no sympathy; and if they stand and resist officers of the law they are liable to be cut down.

Implicitly the judge rendered judgment on those women who stepped outside accepted gender roles for women; those who behaved "like men" and participated in protest actions would be "cut down" by the strong arm of the law, thus losing their special "privileges" and "protections" as women. Class and gender expectations were intertwined; respectable middle class or upper class women would not participate in such unseemly behaviour.¹¹

III. Labour unrest and the Mathers Commission

Clearly, the Winnipeg General Strike occupied centre stage in the spring and summer of 1919; as other writers have pointed out, however, the
industrial unrest of the period extended across the country, in varying degrees and for local as well as national reasons. Activism among labour women, as workers, as union or socialist militants and as working class wives appeared to span the continent as well, although Winnipeg provides the most detailed evidence of concerted action. Working-class women testifying before the Mathers Commission detailed the conditions affecting women in their local areas; when this evidence is placed in context, it suggests the scope of women’s activism in many urban centres. Outspoken women in Regina, Calgary, and Montreal appeared before the Commission to give their views; for Toronto, other evidence will be examined.14

One of the outspoken Saskatchewan women, Mrs. Resina Asals of Regina’s WLL, outlined conditions in Regina for women, based on her experience as a working-man’s wife, a mother of four and a wage earner. Asals cited examples of young inexperienced women earning $7 to $8 per week or less and noted that it was no wonder that some women turned to immoral ways on these wages. Clerks at Eaton’s or Simpson’s stores started out at $6 to $8. Organization of working women was difficult, she noted, referring to attempts to organize the city’s waitresses and waiters during the war. The workers could thank the capitalists, however, for “awakening the worker up to the fact that he is the most important factor and that until we produce for use instead of profit this unrest will still prevail.” Worsening conditions affected women directly, often forcing married women to seek employment. In her own case, as the wife of a carpenter now a disabled returned soldier, she had been forced to seek work to support the family. Her testimony also detailed Regina’s poor housing and high rents which consumed one-third of the wage packet; most workers could not own their own homes because of high prices for housing, food and clothing. “Can you wonder why a woman would rather die than bring children into a world like this?” she asked. On the newly established Minimum Wage Board, her class consciousness was complimented by a strong feminist position. Not only were there no workers on the Board, there were three men and two women; if they must have men then the ratio should have been reversed. When queried further, she asserted: ‘Yes, I would advocate all women and no men at all, I do not suppose the men would come and ask the women that they want would they?’15

Regina’s labour women organized a Women’s Labor League in March 1917 with Mrs. Ralph Heseltine as president. Supported by the Regina TLC, the WLL combined social events with efforts to investigate the conditions of working women and to organize them, as Asals’ testimony to the Mathers Commission demonstrates. The WLL in 1919 raised money to send delegates to the June Calgary conference of the One Big Union and took a position in favour of the OBU in May; Carpenter Ralph Heseltine represented the RTLC at the Calgary convention. Regina workers supported the general sympathetic strike in a vote, but only a small number eventually turned out, suggesting the existence of considerable tension
within the labour movement over these questions which resulted in a purge of the leadership in August, including Heseltine and Joseph Sambrook, both OBU supporters. The WLL, however, continued to function and cooperated with the RTLC on the minimum wage issue. The League also continued to support the Winnipeg Defense Fund by raising money.16

Calgary's labour women were represented before the commission by two outspoken defenders of working class women, Mary Corse and Jean McWilliam; while Corse represented the Trades and Labor Council and played a direct role on Calgary's General Strike Committee, McWilliam appeared as an individual. As a soldier's wife she had organized a Next-of-Kin Association during the war, as well a organizing laundry workers. Supporting herself and children by running a boarding house, McWilliam became increasingly radicalized during the war by her frustrations with government policies regarding soldiers' dependents, the high cost of living and wage discrimination toward women workers. She warned that revolt was imminent and stated dramatically: "If they ask us, 'Are we in favour of a bloody revolution' why any kind of revolution would be better than conditions as they are now." Like Mary Corse, McWilliam keenly felt class differences and criticized the Local Council of Women for their refusal to intervene in the firing of women laundry workers once they were unionized. McWilliam also expressed a clear sense of solidarity with working class women in commenting on Corse's testimony regarding a pregnant woman's advertisement for someone to adopt her unborn child. The mother of four children could not afford another, which led McWilliam to urge women to wake up and not sit back. "Men push us back and tell us to shut our mouths and keep quiet," she fumed. Neither McWilliam nor Corse sat back and kept quiet. Mary Corse's testimony before the Royal Commission documented the conditions of female labour in Calgary as well as commenting on a variety of other relevant issues, such as the cost of living, the need for a living wage, the housing shortage and inflationary rents, and unequal educational opportunities for working-class children. Speaking as a working woman and mother of six children, Corse pinpointed women's working conditions as one important cause of unrest among women. "Almost every day, women are being added to the ranks of, shall I say, the socialist party or those with socialist inclinations," she warned. The high cost of living and vast inequalities between the classes also helped to explain the unrest. As a labour representative on the Calgary School Board Corse asserted that only six percent of Calgary's children reached high school because they were needed as wage earners, thus underlining her point about class inequality. Married women also had to leave home and children in order for the family to survive; unlike many progressive women, Corse was not totally enamored of mothers' pensions, insisting that decent wages for women would help more. Corse was also more outspoken than any other woman testifying before the Commission on the need for birth control information. Class inequalities persisted here
as well she noted in reference to the case of the pregnant woman with four children: “Birth control is a crime to the poor woman but the well-to-do woman who says she can only do justice to two or three children is commended for her intelligent outlook.”

Within a few weeks of testifying before the Commission, both women were deeply involved in a women’s committee to aid the Calgary general sympathetic strike which lasted from 26 May to 25 June. Mary Corse played a particularly prominent role on the Women’s Committee and the Central Strike Committee. As in Winnipeg, the labour women organized mass meetings for women, petitions, fund-raising events, and provided food for strikers. The general strike also provided the opportunity to organize a Labour Women’s Council along the lines of the WLL. Corse served as president while McWilliam acted as vice-president. In addition to presenting petitions calling for the reinstatement of postal workers who had been fired by the government for taking part in sympathetic strikes, the Labour Women’s Council appointed a committee to appear before the School Board to protest against teachers poisoning the minds of pupils in their comments in class that the strike was led by Bolshevists who should be shot. The School Board agreed that teachers should not force their opinions on pupils. This concern with influences on children was a continuing feature of Calgary’s LWC in the months that followed; Mary Corse’s position on the School Board obviously influenced the group’s activities. In November 1919 the LWC engaged in a controversy over child health and opposed a proposal that milk would be distributed to needy children by the Associated Charities; McWilliam argued for universal distribution of milk to all children and for a policy of state assistance to needy children. The controversy over child malnutrition continued to surface occasionally in 1920. In addition to these activities, the LWC, later renamed the WLL, was an active force in defending women workers and working class concerns more generally.

As the Mathers Commission moved from west to east, reaching Montreal by late May, the labour situation had become critical. In Montreal itself labour unrest would peak in June, but would continue to trouble the city throughout the summer, with major strikes fought in the shipyards, in the textiles industry, in the garment industry, in the rubber industry and in the building trades, among others. While the move toward a general strike failed, recent historical work indicates a militant wave of labour and socialist activity in Montreal which drew on the discontent of the war period and a strong reaction to the anti-labour policies of the municipal government. As elsewhere, the latter part of the war witnessed waves of organization among Montreal’s workers, including women in the clothing, rubber, and textile industries as well as clerical workers, salesclerks, and waitresses. Workers’ clubs also grew in numbers in the immediate post-war period, providing social and political bases for Montreal workers; some affiliated with the Parti Ouvrier, Quebec’s labour party. The socialist
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movement in Montreal drew on a multi-ethnic population with strong representation from the Jewish, Russian, Ukrainian, Italian, Polish, French, and English communities; this socialist presence was particularly striking in May, 1919 when 3,000 May Day marchers confronted the police who confiscated the red flags carried by marchers in defiance of police orders. Later in May, as the Mathers Commission gathered in Montreal, a large rally in support of the Winnipeg General Strike attracted several thousand people who listened to speeches by several representatives of various labour and socialist groups, including “socialist” Rebecca Buhay, the Social Democratic Party’s Mrs. R. P. Mendelssohn, and the Parti Ouvrier’s Rose Henderson. All three women were prominent in Montreal left-wing politics; Henderson was the only one of the three to testify before the Mathers Commission a few days after the rally.19

Henderson testified on 29 May, not as a representative of the labour party but in her official capacity as the non-Catholic probation officer for Montreal. Her work at the Juvenile Court involved her in working-class family life and she remarked on the wartime increases in the caseload of the Juvenile Court which she linked to the economic difficulties experienced by the working class; in the majority of homes fathers earned $12 to $15 per week as unskilled labourers and were only seasonally employed. The children of such families often worked for low wages as well as their mothers, especially when there were no other sources of income. The current labour unrest results, she said, from two groups: the ‘underdog’ class three days away from starvation whose children turned up in juvenile court and the organized mass of labour who were determined not to return to pre-war conditions. The latter group, especially the mothers, wanted a better life for their children; organized labour also greatly resented the suppression of free speech. Her solutions included getting rid of profiteers, prohibiting child labour under 16, social welfare schemes, particularly mothers’ pensions and the six hour day. Women were the source of social change, according to Henderson: “I might also say that in a great many houses that I visit, it is not the father who expresses himself; I find the real revolutionist is the mother — not the man. She says openly that there is nothing but Revolution.”20

Henderson’s feminism blended with her social democratic views which combined a keen concern for women and children with a social conscience shaped by her work in the working-class areas of Montreal; for Henderson, the women of the working class offered the greatest hope for change. Her viewpoint was strongly shaped by maternal feminist convictions shared by middle and upper class women reformers of the day who also found hope for change in women as a social group generally, rather than among working class women in particular. Her class awareness, however, set her apart from these women and gave her the impetus to participate in the labour movement and later the peace movement as well. In the spring and summer of 1919 she found some common ground with more radical
Montreal women in the promise of the One Big Union.

The previously mentioned Winnipeg General Strike rally in Montreal provided Henderson and others with a platform to support both the strike and the OBU; while Henderson’s speech indicated interest in the OBU, an undated letter from Henderson to R.B. Russell, Winnipeg’s key figure in the general strike and the OBU campaign, indicates that Henderson was actively promoting the OBU in Northern Ontario while on an organizing tour, possibly for the ILP. She asked Russell to send her more OBU material: “I am boosting it for all its worth, the idea is catching well,” she wrote. The Montreal rally also featured a speech by Rebecca Buhay who attacked craft unionism and the capitalist press while urging working class support for the OBU. Buhay was an important figure in the radical movement in Montreal, along with her close colleague Annie Buller; both were active in the OBU, as surveillance reports indicate. An agent reported that on 13 November 1919, Buhay was elected organizer for the Montreal Local of the OBU and later, English Recording Secretary for the General Workers’ Unit; Annie Buller filled the role of vice-president. Both women later played prominent roles in the Communist Party of Canada. Buller’s reminiscences of Buhay, and surviving correspondence between them, indicate the close support these women gave each other in the earlier period and their shared commitment not only to socialism, but also to women’s causes. Buller’s first memory of Buhay was a lecture Becky gave to a group of socialist men shortly after her arrival from England—her discussion of Ibsen’s A Doll’s House stressed the need for the franchise, equal pay, and unions for exploited women workers, and established “a lasting friendship between us,” Buller noted. While both women followed socialist orthodoxy on the “woman question”, they were keenly aware of the need to mobilize women as well as men.11

The issues brought to a head by the Winnipeg strike and the local strikes in Montreal—collective bargaining, freedom of speech, and the OBU—also brought Ms. R. P. Mendelssohn of the Social Democratic Party into the public debate. As secretary of the “socialist committee” planning the 1919 May Day parade, Mendelssohn informed the press that if violence resulted, it would be the fault of the capitalists. Municipal authorities also banned the use of public parks such as Fletcher’s Field in Mount Royal Park without express permission; in early June, the police broke up a socialist gathering at the park and arrested Mendelssohn who loudly protested against the police presence and the use of mounted officers. Insisting on her right as a citizen to use the park, Mendelssohn defended the use of the park by socialists at her trial, citing previous practice and the fact that she had written the mayor for permission, but had received no answer. The charge was dismissed, despite police testimony that her actions constituted incitement to rebellion. As well as defending free speech, Mendelssohn also actively worked for the OBU and the establishment of a rival trades and labour council sympathetic to OBU goals, known as the “Industrial
Council.” According to surveillance information, Mendelssohn was also a correspondent for the socialist paper, the New York Call and was listed by the authorities as “dangerous.”

Thus in Montreal, as in Winnipeg, Regina and Calgary, a nucleus of activist women existed who played public roles in the labour unrest of 1919, through the labour and socialist movement. What about the rest of the country? While other major centres did not produce women witnesses before the Mathers Commission who might provide the historian with first-hand glimpses of women’s views and actions, labour unrest among women workers in specific industries was substantial in places like Toronto, Amherst, and Vancouver. Because of time limitations, only Toronto will be dealt with here.

Toronto’s general sympathetic strike of 30 May to 4 June resembled Winnipeg’s in so far as the metal trades were at the centre of the crisis; the eight-hour day and collective bargaining along with a 44-hour week provided the bone of contention which led to the sympathetic walkout of 44 unions and 12,000 workers. Approximately 2,000 of those who went out were garment workers, half of them women. Their support of the metal trades workers proved to be a prelude to a summer long garment workers strike which lasted from July until September. The general sympathetic strike in Toronto signified, however, more widespread activities among the previously unorganized or weakly organized, largely ‘unskilled’ workers, including women. The Toronto District Labor Council (TDLC) had launched an organizing drive and had within two months recruited 10,000 new members, many of them unskilled or semi-skilled workers, including candy and chocolate workers, rubber workers, and employees in the meat-packing plants. A week-long strike of packing house workers included “several hundred girls;” the conciliation board appointed to work out a settlement discussed the issue of equal pay, but failed to reach an agreement, apparently unable to reach a mutually acceptable definition of what constituted ‘equal work.’ The only concession aimed at the women in the final settlement was an agreement that the companies would pay one-half the cost of necessary clothing worn by the women in the plants.

Waitresses and domestics in Toronto as elsewhere unionized in late 1918 and early 1919. In the case of domestic workers, the Toronto WLL assisted the women, under the guidance of Mrs. L. MacGregor, president of the WLL. The Domestic Workers Association secretary, Sarah Davies pointed out that the domestics were affiliated with the Hotel and Restaurant workers, but made their own decisions. Their goals were an eight-hour day, no apprenticeship, one day off per week, and $60 per month for ‘live-outs’ and $40 per month for ‘live-ins’; the organization also discussed sickness and death benefits. As of 21 June, 100 women had signed up for the union which maintained its willingness to discuss matters with employers.

Other groups of women workers, such as women bookbinders, textile
workers, telephone operators, and waitresses, increased their union membership in the spring and summer of 1919, but the dramatic focus of the summer centered on the long garment workers's strike which began on 2 July. The general sympathetic strike had delayed the union's plan to present their demands for a new wage scale, an end to piece-work, and a 44-hour week, according to the union's representative and former member of the Central Strike Committee, S. Koldofsky. Garment workers joined strikers in the metal trades and on the street railroad in July; their demands also included limits on overtime and time and one-half for overtime, holidays, no overtime where there were unemployed garment workers, and a guarantee of a half-day's pay when called into work, whether they worked or not. While the garment workers were scattered among dozens of shops and sewed various sorts of garments, the four locals worked together under a joint board of cloak, suit, and dressmakers' locals for maximum leverage with the employers. Smaller shops came to terms with the union more quickly than the large manufacturers; the Employers' Association which included the larger firms remained unmoved, their resolve probably hardened by the simultaneous strike among the metal trades. The garment workers remained solid, however, backed by the ILGWU which sent its president to Toronto in July to bolster the strike. Striker resolve brought a number of strikers into court, arrested for interfering with scabs on the picket line. At least four young women strikers appeared in Magistrate's Court in July for heckling or striking scabs; all four were Jewish and some tensions surfaced between Jews and non-Jews in the strike. Representative Koldofsky reported to the TDLC that those who refused to honour the strike were gentiles and urged solidarity. Striker resolve, temporarily broken in mid-August, hardened after an attempt to settle with the employers by substituting a demand for week work and a minimum wage for the original demand for an end to piecework failed. The sticking point focused on recognition of the union; while the workers failed to get full recognition of the union, the strike ended in September with considerable gains and with the satisfaction that the employers had had to deal with representatives of the Cloakmakers' as a body, rather than with individual shop councils.

IV. Aftermath

While local labour strife tended to occupy front stage in Toronto, the Winnipeg General Strike and the defence of the strikers was not entirely forgotten in July and August, when several of the strike leaders visited to address local audiences. A crowd of 5,000 listened to John Queen, A.A. Heaps, and T.H. Dunn when they spoke at Queen's Park in mid-July. Helen Armstrong's visit in August, sponsored by the "Women's Labor Union", probably the WLL, drew much smaller audiences, although
Armstrong herself commented favourably on the strong committees in Toronto and Hamilton when she returned to Winnipeg. When in Toronto, however, she castigated the TDLC for its “lukewarm” support of the Winnipeg strike leaders, comments which apparently hit home; a Defence Committee was appointed shortly after her remarks. 16

Toronto labour and socialist women, however, did not emerge as strong figures in the preceding events. The local WLL was active in organizing women workers, as the example of the Domestic Workers’ Association indicates. Other activities, however, seem to have preoccupied the identifiable leaders of the WLL. The summer of 1919 also witnessed a strong surge of activity centered around the Labour Educational Association (LEA), publisher of the Industrial Banner, and independent labour politics. At the LEA convention at the end of May, women delegates from all over the province met to set up a structure to organize women on a broad scale, not only as workers, but also as political organizers for the fall elections. Women from union auxiliaries, the Social Democratic Party, the ILP, the WLL, and women representing unions with women workers met to plan a strategy to mobilize women in the coming months. While these activities cannot be discussed here in any detail, they do suggest that a great deal of labour and socialist women’s energies were focused on this campaign, which dovetailed with the surge of labour electoral success in the fall election. Toronto’s WLL representatives, Mrs. Lucy McGregor and Mrs. Rose Hodgson, were active social democrats whose sympathies lay with a broad alliance of labour and socialist groups. Hodgson’s political origins stemmed back to the British ILP and Christian socialism; while a strong supporter of organizing single women workers, she clearly opposed married women’s work, where the husband earned an adequate wage. Hodgson introduced a resolution to that effect at the May LEA convention which passed unanimously. Lucy McGregor had been active since 1914 in the Women’s Social Democratic League, affiliated to the SDP; her participation in the LEA activities suggests that she shared many of Hodgson’s views. Thus, while women activists were visible in the events of 1919, their activism spread over a wide variety of labour and socialist projects, with a decided focus on a broad alliance among women. 17

This cross-country tour of women’s activism has suggested a wide variety of responses and levels of activity characterized the crisis of 1919. While the strikes themselves ended formally in the summer, the reverberations of the strike and the trials continued to be a concern of labour and socialist women. Like their male counterparts, women across the country felt a responsibility toward the strike leaders and their families as the trials were held in the fall of 1919, ultimately resulting in jail terms for most of the leaders. Winnipeg again was the centre of organization for the Defence Committee, formed shortly after the strike ended. Its main purpose was to raise funds for legal costs and for the support of strike
leaders' families, but it also used fund-raising events to defend the right of collective bargaining and free speech. In Winnipeg, the Committee consisted of representatives of various labour and socialist groups, including the Winnipeg TLC, the Central Labor Council of the OBU, the Ex-Soldiers and Sailors Labor Party, the Building Trades Council, the SPC, the Labor Church, the Dominion Labor Party, and the WLL. Despite the tensions between the TLC and the OBU, the Defence Committee received support even from those unions opposed to the OBU. Financial support from union locals, individuals, and women's organizations enabled the Committee to send speakers all over the country, organize protests and publish a bulletin. In Winnipeg the WLLs raised money through dances, concerts, bazaars, and picnics, efforts which were repeated elsewhere across the country. Women speakers addressed local labour meetings and protest rallies as well; Helen Armstrong made several trips to Ontario, as noted previously; in addition to her August trip, she accompanied George Armstrong to the Hamilton Trades and Labor Congress in October, 1919, representing the WLL. "The Wild Woman of the West," as she was dubbed by eastern newspapers, found the East too quiet for her liking. Other women also spoke to audiences in support of the Winnipeg strikers. Winona Flett, wife of the labourite strike leader Fred Dixon, spoke on the strike at a farmers' picnic in Saskatchewan in July. In the east, Sarah Johnston-Knight and Joe Knight, SPC and OBU members, gathered support in Ontario where they had moved after the purge of OBU supporters from the Edmonton TLC and the end of the general strike. Montreal's women socialists also raised money for the Defence Committee, as did the WLL in Calgary. In the latter city, Jean McWilliam was instrumental in organizing the Calgary Defence Committee, with WLL initiative playing a key role; McWilliam reported considerable interest in the outlying districts in the Defence Committee. Mary Corse also threw her energies into several protest meetings in the spring of 1920. A protest meeting held in early April passed a resolution condemning the imprisonment of the strike leaders who were "suffering in a just cause for the supposed rights of free speech." A second meeting held a few days later featured A. A. Heaps of Winnipeg; Corse also spoke and urged the working class to stand together for the welfare of their children. Scenes such as these were repeated across the country, with women in the labour and socialist movement taking important, if sometimes traditional roles, to defend controversial working-class principles.

Labour and socialist women across the country responded to the post-war crisis and their newly-won enfranchisement through active involvement in election campaigns, mostly at the municipal and provincial level in 1919 and 1920. From Nova Scotia to British Columbia, women organized, supported, and sometimes ran as candidates for labour parties which included socialists, labourites, and sometimes OBU supporters. While there are many examples of this phenomenon, one case study will
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suffice to illustrate the extent of activity. The aftermath of the 1919 labour revolt for political activism in an electoral context was particularly noticeable in Winnipeg, where the fall municipal elections set the stage for a contest between labour and its opponents. With the Winnipeg strike trials about to begin, tensions were high and the labour movement determined to win some political power through the ballot box. The question of women’s votes was a highly contentious one in Winnipeg; although women had the vote, property qualifications still limited the size of the electorate, effectively disqualifying those who did not own property, particularly women and the working class. Nevertheless, the women’s vote in general was viewed as a weapon useful to labour. Helen Armstrong, at the mass protest meeting held on 7 September in the city stated: “Women’s vote had given us the club. Now we wanted women to use it.” In addition to the vote, three women contested the school board elections as labour candidates in December 1919. Mrs. Rose Alcin, a Jewish woman from Winnipeg’s North End successfully defeated her Jewish male opponent whose views were conservative. Alcin was attacked in the press as lacking in education, to which she responded that the present educational system trained children to be “obedient slaves to the existing capitalistic order and future good members of the committee of 1,000.” Running with Alcin were two other prominent labour women, Mrs. Jessie Kirk and Mrs. E. Hancox, both of whom were British-born and prominent members and speakers in various organizations, including the Labor Church, the WLL, and the Dominion Labor Party. Kirk had been fired from her job as a school teacher for her political activities, a factor which no doubt added to her decision to run. All three women candidates ran on a programme which advocated among other things, equal pay for equal work without regard to sex, free text books, open school board meetings, collective bargaining rights for teachers and the abolition of property qualifications for school trustees. Only Alcin succeeded in this election; Jessie Kirk, however, ran in 1920 for municipal council and was elected. Kirk, along with WLL and Labour Church activist, Mrs. Rowe, were elected to the executive committee of the DLP in March 1920, giving women two of the nine seats. Women were constantly urged to take public roles in the DLP by women activists and occasionally by the men; speakers urged women to use their close connections with children and even with life itself (as opposed to property) in the service of labour politics. Even before the Winnipeg General Strike, Winona Flett went so far as to urge women’s participation in the DLP for the protection of men, although she pointed out that women needed relief from the drudgery of the household through cooperative schemes, for this to succeed. When the provincial election campaign of 1920 began, women in the DLP had moved in a noticeably more feminist direction, planning to run several women candidates. While both Helen Armstrong and Jessie Kirk withdrew in favour of the incarcerated strike leaders, Kirk expressed disappointment at what was clearly seen as a
sacrifice for labour's cause. Winona Flett also urged women to support labour's candidates in the election, yet she also expressed regret at an election meeting of 2,000; furthermore, she urged more women to join the Labor Party to make it 50/50: "...she served notice there and then that they (women) would demand nothing less than a 50/50 ticket."²⁹

V. Conclusion

That women were afforded "no special protection" and "no sympathy" because of their sex became only too clear during the Canadian labour revolt. Women activists faced arrest, trial, internment, and surveillance along with the men. While internment was used most often against 'enemy aliens', police and judicial activities, as well as government-sanctioned surveillance affected all. Ironically, the latter provides historians with valuable information on individuals and organizations, as well as insights into government policy on domestic surveillance and government reactions to labour unrest.

A focus on women's activism in 1919 suggests wide-ranging and variable levels of organization across the country. The patterns of strength and weakness are by no means clear-cut at this point; nevertheless, it is certainly not the case that women in the labour and socialist movement organized only in the 'radical' west. In addition, the prominence of certain groups of women workers across the country — telephone workers, garment and textile workers, waitresses and other service workers — indicates that militancy among newly organized groups of women occurred in those circumstances where support was strong from the labour and socialist movement. The existence of working class women's organizations with strong female leadership also proved vital in a number of urban centres. As with the socialist movement and the radical labour movement, lack of a national focus and viable organization tended to localize women's activism. The local nature of women's activism, however, may well have been the source of its strength as well as its weakness.

This paper has also suggested that the local context for women's activism stemmed from a redefinition of 'political' activity, based on family and community needs as well as on more formal political institutions. That this locally-based political activity usually complemented, but sometimes differed with, the aims of men, particularly in the public arena of electoral politics, serves to underline the potential for gender conflict and reminds us that sexual divisions within the working class helped to shape that experience.
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Notes


2 Mary Horodyski, “Women and the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919,” Manitoba History, No.11 (Spring 1986), 28-37, is the only published article to date on women during 1919. James E. Cronin, “Labour Insurgency and Class Formation: Comparative Perspectives on the Crisis of 1917-1920 in Europe,” Social Science History, Vol. 4, No.1. (Winter 1980), 125-52, argues that the crisis of these years produced similar waves of organization in many European countries, characterized by the prominent roles played by women in community-based actions, especially related to consumer issues. His book, Labour and Society in Britain, 1918-1979 (London, 1984), 31, develops this argument further, noting also the 270 percent increase in trade union membership among women as well in Great Britain from 1914-18.

3 Royal Commission on Industrial Relations, “Evidence,” 26 April to 13 June 1919 (4 vols., mfm copy, Public Archives of Canada); the women’s testimony will be discussed more directly below. For a discussion of organizing women workers during the latter part of the war, see L. Kealey, “Women and Labour During World War I: Women Workers and the Minimum Wage in Manitoba,” in Mary Kinnear, ed., First Days, Fighting Days (Regina, 1987); this article also looks at the Women’s Labor League of Winnipeg and its activities; on soldier’s wives’ organizations, see L. Kealey, “Prairie Socialist Women and World War I: The Urban West,” unpublished paper, 1986. For information on the organization of women in Toronto, see Jim Naylor, “Toronto, 1919”; for Montreal, see Ewan, “La Contestation,” 43ff.; for Vancouver, see Conley, “Class Conflict,” especially chapters 9, 11 and 13. On the state and immigrant

4 See Kealey, "The State, Immigrant Radicalism..." p.11 on the twin crises of 1914-20. A recent collection of articles edited by Ruth Milkman, Women, Work and Protest. A Century of Women's Labour History (Boston, 1985), usefully cautious against substituting a new myth of militancy for old myths of passivity among women workers. She carefully notes that we need to know which historical circumstances encourage or impede women's militancy; effective mobilization utilizes forms rooted in women's culture and experience. Furthermore, it is instructive to examine the structural characteristics of unionism as well as the impact of the broader gender ideology. For the purposes of this paper, militancy denotes the participation of women in strike actions or the defence of women workers, working-class women's organizations or general working class interests by means of economic or political actions requiring a stand in opposition to dominant interests; while militancy may mean confrontation with the law, it does not always entail such confrontations.

5 See Angela Miles and Geraldine Finn, eds., Feminism in Canada (Toronto, 1983) especially Miles, "Ideological Hegemony in Political Discourse: Women's Specificity and Equality," 213-227.; my thinking on this question has also been shaped by Jill McCalla Vickers, "Feminist Approaches to Women in Politics," in Linda Kealey and Joan Sangster, eds., Beyond the Vote: Canadian Women and Politics (Toronto, 1989). It should also be noted that during the war years, tensions between working-class and middle-class women were exacerbated during labour disputes when middle-class women intervened to scab on those who were strikers, particularly in Winnipeg, 1918 and 1919 and Vancouver during 1919; these women replaced telephone operators in both cities.

6 Quote from Horodyski, "Women and the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919,"

7 Globe, 16 May 1919, p.1; Western Labor News (WLN) 16 May 1919, p.8; Armstrong reported in the WLN, 16 May 1919, p.8 that knitting and laundry women were organized. A day long meeting was announced for the purpose of organizing all women workers in WLN, 19 May 1919, p.3. Organizing meetings for specific groups of women workers were reported in the WLN throughout the course of the strike. Armstrong's arrest was reported in the Toronto Globe, 17 May 1919 and the Toronto Star, 17 May 1919. The dining room was mentioned in WLN, 23 May 1919, p.1, under the auspices of the Women's Labor League and the administration of Helen Armstrong. Donations of food were requested in the same edition of the WLN, p.2. The opening of the dining room is reported in the WLN, 24 May 1919, p.3. Examples of Labor Church collections for the dining room appear in WLN, 26 May, 27 May and 2 June 1919. The WLL authorized fund raising events for the dining room as fragmentary evidence from the exhibits collected for the trial of the Winnipeg General Strike leaders shows. See Exhibit 171, 11 June 1919, King vs. William Ivens, RG 4 A1 (Provincial Archives of Manitoba). For the Relief Committee's role, see Horodyski, "Women," p.30 and WLN, 23 May 1919, p.3; for the YWCA's role, see Horodyski, ibid., p.30; offers of rooms for striking women appear in WLN, 27 May 1919, p.2.

8 See Horodyski, "Women", p.31 and WLN, 16 May 1919, p.8 for confectionery workers; for store clerks, see Horodyski, "Women," p.32 and WLN, 19 May
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9 On the organization of waitresses, see L. Kealey, “Women Workers and World War I.” See WLN, 3 January 1919, p.1; 10 January 1919, p.1; 24 January 1919, p.1 and 31 January 1919, p.1. For the drive to increase the membership of the union, WLN, 16 May 1919, p.8 reported the union as nearly 100 percent organized and showed that culinary workers supported the general strike. Lockouts are listed in WLN, 27 May 1919, p.3. For a report on the evasions of the Minimum Wage, see WLN, 10 October 1919, p.8 and 17 October 1919, p.8; Tribune, 27 June 1919, p.3; WLN 28 June 1919, p.3 and 9 July 1919, p.1. Reorganization of the union is discussed in WLN, 29 August 1919, p.4 and 7 November 1919, p.8. The international organizer, Mackenzie, noted that the union was “badly shaken” during the 1919 strike but was now recovering in WLN, 24 September 1920, p.4.

10 For a discussion of the telephone operators activities in 1917 and 1918, see L. Kealey, “Women Workers and World War I,” and Horodyski, “Women,” 32–33. WLN, 19 May 1919, p.4; 20 May 1919, p.2; 21 May 1919, p.3; 24 May 1919, p.3; 26 May 1919, p.4. Intimidation is reported in WLN, 3 June 1919, p.2. WLN, 14 June 1919, p.1 reported the arrival in Winnipeg of six operators from Carman who had been replaced. The statement of Telephone Commissioner George A. Watson is reprinted in the Toronto Star, 19 June 1919. The Winnipeg Tribune, 27 June 1919, p.3 reported 225 vacancies, 350 applications and the loss of seniority as well as the “no strike” pledge. Dors Meakin’s statement is found in the Toronto Star, 30 June 1919. Helen Armstrong’s report to the Winnipeg TLC is in WLN, 3 July 1919, p.3. The WLN, 10 July 1919, p.3 reported 119 operators had been refused reinstatement.

11 Star (Toronto), 4 June 1919, p.3; WLN, 5 June 1919, p.2; Tribune (Winnipeg), 6 June 1919, p.2; Star, 7 June 1919, p.1; Tribune, 10 June 1919, p.1; the Toronto Star noted that Mrs. J. McCrom was fined $20 and costs for assaulting a delivery truck driver; see Star, 13 June 1919, p.24; on 19 June 1919, the Star reported 20 women and men strikers has been fined or imprisoned on charges of intimidation. “Bloody Saturday”, 21 June, followed the arrest of the strike leaders late in the evening of 16 June and in the early hours of 17 June. A silent parade to protest these arrests turned into a riot when special police and the RNWMP attacked the protesters, killing one person and injuring others. Mayor Gray’s statement was quoted in the Toronto Star, 24 June 1919, p.9.

12 Armstrong, Krantz and Steinhauer’s arrest was reported in the Winnipeg Tribune, 13 June 1919, p.1; Armstrong was committed for trial on 24 June and the other two were tried on the same day. See the Tribune, 24 June 1919, p.5; Star, 25 June 1919, p.4; Tribune, 27 June 1919, p.2 and 28 June 1919, p.5; WLN, 27 June 1919, p.1; Star, 28 June 1919, p.3; WLN, 28 June 1919, p.1. For the account of Helen Armstrong’s actions regarding her husband’s arrest, see the Star, 19 June 1919.

13 See WLN, 15 August 1919, p.8 for the quote from Gouldie; the protest parade
is described in *WLN*, 5 September 1919, p.1 and in the One Big Union (OBU) *Bulletin*, 6 September 1919, p.2. Helen Armstrong’s speech at the rink and the petition campaign are covered in the *Winnipeg Tribune*, 8 September 1919, pp.1 and 4 and 9 September 1919, p.1. *WLN*, 12 September 1919, p.1 reports the release of George Armstrong on bail. Strike leaders were officially welcomed at a reception sponsored by the WLL and others; 1000 people turned out according to *WLN*, 19 September 1919, p.1. Metcalfe is quoted in *WLN*, 19 December 1919, p.6.

14 For Montreal, see Ewen, “La Contestation. . .”, 40-41.
15 Royal Commission on Industrial Relations, Evidence, Saskatoon, 7 May 1919, 1035-37; Regina, 8 May 1919, 1189-96.
16 The *Winnipeg Voice*, 16 March 1917, p.5 noted the creation of the Regina WLL; WLL activities reported in the Regina Trades and Labor Council Minutes of 13 August 1917, 28 April 1919, 8 September 1919; the OBU support appears in *WLN*, 8 May 1919, p.1; on the general outlines of the Saskatchewan labour movement, see W.J.C. Cherwinski, “Organized Labour in Saskatchewan, 1905-1945,” University of Alberta, PhD. thesis, 1972, especially Chapter 2. For tensions within the RTLC, see Minutes of 2 June 1919 and 23 August 1919; on the minimum wage issue see RTLC Minutes, 8 September 1919.
17 On McWilliam’s activities during World War I and the class conscious nature of Calgary’s Next-of-Kin Association, see L. Kealey, “Prairie Socialist Women and WWI: The Urban West,” unpublished paper, 1986; Royal Commission on Industrial Relations, Evidence, Calgary, 2 May 1919, 782-793 (McWilliam) and 635-650 (Corse).
18 The United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners, Local 1779 (Calgary), Minutes, 29 May 1919, Glenbow-Alberta Institute, record Mary Corse’s presence as a representative of the Central Strike Committee. For more information on Corse, see L. Kealey, “Prairie Socialist Women. . .” and *Woman’s Century*, April 1920, p.25; Corse was born in England and married George Corse who worked in the printing trade as a machinist, linotype operator and printer at various times. The activities of the Women’s Committee during the general sympathetic strike are covered in the Calgary *Strike Bulletin*, No.2, 31 May 1919, No.6, 7 June 1919, No.8, 14 June 1919, No.9, 16 June 1919, No.10, 18 June 1919. The LWC was formed in direct imitation of Winnipeg’s WLL after Corse met Helen Armstrong and Mrs. Logan of that city’s WLL through OBU activities. The controversy over child health appears in the *Calgary Herald*, 24 November 1919, p.8, 26 November 1919, p.10 and in the *Searchlight*, 28 November 1919, p.4 and 20 February 1920, p.1. The LWC also protested working conditions for waitresses at the CPR lunch counter and lobbied for changes to Alberta’s Factory Act which would benefit women workers. See *Edmonton Free Press*, 27 December 1919, p.5 and *Searchlight*, 3 September 1920, p.3. They also agitated for free treatment for tubercular patients: *Searchlight*, 23 January 1920, p.4. In 1920 they also took part in the Calgary Defense Committee, established to defend the Winnipeg General Strike leaders and the principles of collective bargaining and free speech.
19 See *Chronologie des mouvements politiques ouvriers au Québec de la fin du XIXe à 1919*, Mai 1976, 258-93, published by the Regroupement de chercheurs en histoire des travailleurs québécois; Ewen, “La contestation. . .”; Gregory S. Kealey,
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“1919...,” 22-3; The May Day parade is described by J. Lanch, “May First in Montreal,” Justice (New York, publication of the ILGWU), 10 May 1919, p. 3. The Winnipeg general strike rally is covered in the Montreal Gazette, 28 May 1919; it was sponsored by the IAM and the Amalgamated Society of Engineers. For Buhay and Mendelssohn—see below.

Royal Commission on Industrial Relations, Evidence, Montreal, 29 May 1919, 3147-3168. Henderson was born in Ireland to a family with radical views on education and politics; as a widow with a daughter to bring up, she moved from volunteer work to the juvenile court; she also had worked in factories, laundries and restaurants, living and working with the young women employed there, according to a biographical note in the Workers Weekly (Stellarton, N.S.), 6 August 1920. By 1920 she had joined the ILP, organizing in Ontario and the Maritimes. She also was a member of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom; later in her life she joined the CCF and ran for a seat in Toronto in 1935 where she lived in the last years of her life. She died in Toronto on 30 January 1937.

20 The speeches are reported in the Montreal Gazette, 28 May 1919; Rose Henderson to R.B. Russell, no date, King vs. Ivens, Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg (RG 4, A 1 box 3); Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), Personal History File, Rebecca Buhay, 17 November 1919 and 1 July 1920; Annie Buller, “In Memory of Becky Buhay,” Marxist Quarterly (December 1957-January 1958), 18-22. Buhay was born in London’s East End in 1896, emigrated to Canada in 1913 and died in 1953. For more information on women in the Communist Party of Canada, see Joan Sangster, “Canadian Women in Radical Politics and Labour, 1920-1950,” McMaster University, PhD. thesis, 1984. Two CP biographies pay tribute to two prominent Montreal Communist women: Louise Watson, She Never was Afraid: The Biography of Annie Buller (Toronto, 1976) provides glimpses of Buhay as well; Catherine Vance, Not by Gods But by People...The Story of Bella Hall Gauld (Toronto, 1968) also provides information on the other women. Bella Hall also testified before the Mathers Commission as a resident of the University Settlement on her work with immigrants; her brief testimony underlined the poor health of immigrant children and the miserable living conditions in general. Hall came from Winnipeg where she worked at J.S. Woodsworth’s All Peoples’ Mission before moving to Montreal to work at the Settlement.


23 Star (Toronto), 29 May 1919, p. 1; 30 May 1919, pp. 1 and 5; 22 May 1919, p. 2 for a report on the general organizing drive led by H. Lewis of the TDLC, also a socialist. For the meat-packing strike, see Star, 5 May 1919, p. 1; 22 May 1919, p. 2; 23 May 1919, p. 2. Three days before the meat-packing strike began on 5 May, several hundred women from the Cowan Chocolate and Cocoa Co. struck for half a day for increases in wages and a reduction of hours which they negotiated, despite the fact they were not unionized; by 22 May they had been unionized with the assistance of the TDLC. See Eastern Federationist (New
Glasgow, Nova Scotia), 10 May 1919, p.3.

24 See reports in the Edmonton Free Press, 17 May 1919, p.3 and 21 June 1919, p.5; Star, 4 July 1919, p.9 and 21 July 1919, p.9; the Star, 3 July 1919, p.5, reported on a meeting of the association which discussed a nine-hour day and a $10 minimum indicating that they had perhaps been unsuccessful in pushing the shorter day and higher wage.

25 For the bookbinders, see Industrial Banner (IB), 25 April 1919, p.3 and 16 May 1919, p.3; textile workers: IB, 6 June 1919; boot and shoeworkers: IB, 25 July 1919, p.3; telephone workers: IB, 25 April 1919, p.3. On the Garment Workers’ plans to present new demands in June, see the Toronto Star, 4 June 1919, p.2. For events during the street car strike, especially the role of women, see Star, 24 June 1919, p.2 (“As usual women sympathizers were the most outspoken and vitriolic . . .”). The Star, 25 June 1919, p.3 covered the riot at the Lansdowne barns between strikers and scabs. The events of the garment workers’ strike are covered in: IB, 4 July 1919, p.1; Star, 8 July 1919, p.20; 10 July 1919, p.4; 12 July 1919, p.4 (visit of ILGWU president Schlesinger and meeting with workers). See the Toronto Star, 4 July 1919, p.8 for Koldolfsky’s comments on gentiles. Arrests and trials of the Jewish women strikers are covered in Star, 15 July 1919, p.2 (Esther Magor); 17 July 1919, p.3 (Molly Fruitman); 30 July 1919, p.3 (Ida Braman and Ada Rosenberg). The strikers had decided to abandon the strike in mid-August but renewed the struggle soon after. See the Montreal Daily Star, 21 August 1919, p.7. The settlement and criticisms of the strikers for almost abandoning the strike appear in Justice, 13 September 1919, p.1 and 20 September 1919, p.4.

26 The Toronto Star, 15 July 1919, p.22 reported on the address by Queen, Heaps, and Dunn. Queen and Heaps were both socialists and aldermen. Dunn represented the Great War Veterans Association. Armstrong’s visit was reported in the Montreal Daily Star, 12 August 1919, p.11 and 19 August 1919, p.11; see also the IB, 15 August, p.3 and 29 August 1919, p.10. The latter carried the critical remarks made by Armstrong; Armstrong’s positive remarks appeared in WLN, 12 September 1919, p.8.

27 The LEA announced in April 1919 that it would inaugurate a new provincial women’s department of work and labour which women would control. See IB, 4 April 1919, p.1. The Industrial Banner carried a number of articles in the summer of 1919 promoting the Labor Party. See IB, 4 July 1919, p.1; 11 July 1919, p.1. The LEA convention in Stratford, Ontario, 24–25 May is covered in IB, 30 May 1919, p.4; 24 women were listed as delegates, including 11 from Toronto. In addition to Hodgson and McGregor, there were women present from the Toronto Ladies’ Auxiliary of the IAM, from the Women’s Social Democratic League, from the bookbinders, domestic workers and textile unions. Hodgson’s Christian socialism can be found in a letter to the IB, 25 April 1919, p.4, in which she described socialism as “the modern church theology” which no longer should be dreaded as revolutionary. The same issue, p.5, covered the ILP convention which identified Hodgson as a founding member of the British ILP in 1893. The convention stressed democratic control of industry and the use of evolutionary means for change, as well as passing resolutions for the release of political prisoners, the recall of Canadian troops from Siberia, a national minimum wage, shorter work days, lying-in grants for expectant mothers and a guarantee for every child of the necessities of life.
McGregor's involvement in the WSDL can be found in various issues of the IB beginning in September 1914.

28 David J. Bercuson, Fools and Wise Men: The Rise and Fall of the One Big Union (Toronto, 1978), especially chapter 6 on "Labour's Civil War." Reports of fund-raising by women appear in the OBU Bulletin, especially: 13 December 1919, p.1; 21 February 1920, p.1; 6 March 1920, p.4; 27 February 1920, p.4 (composition of the Defence Committee); 3 April 1920, p.4; 9 April 1920, p.5; 10 April 1920, p.4 (a bazaar and dance raised almost $2500 from 4,000 supporters); 24 April 1920, p.4 (donations from the Labour Church Women's Auxiliary and Calgary WLL); WLN, 7 May 1920, p.1 (May Day protest parade with 1,000 women and children, carried banner which read: "Labor's Boys of Today are the Men of Tomorrow"); OBU Bulletin, 22 May 1920, pp.1 and 4; 5 June 1920, p.4; 24 July 1920, p.4. Donations were received from Mrs. Mendelsohn, Montreal, Sarah Johnston-Knight, Toronto, Mr. and Mrs. A.V. Thomas, New York (Lillian Beynon Thomas, suffragist/pacifist/socialist/writer, had moved to New York with her journalist husband and her sister, Frances Beynon, in 1917 in protest against pro-war sentiments in Canada; Beynon was the well-known women's page editor of the Grain Growers Guide). Funds also came from Winnipeg's Houseworkers Association and individuals Jewish women. On Helen Armstrong's Ontario trip, see WLN, 12 September 1919, p.8, and 3 October 1919, p.1. Mrs. Dixon's speech in Saskatchewan: WLN, 18 July 1919, p.1. Sarah Johnston-Knight's activities: OBU Bulletin, 25 October 1919, p.6. For Calgary, see Searchlight, 28 November 1919, p.4; 2 April 1920, p.3; 9 April 1920, p.4 and 28 May 1920, p.1; the Calgary Herald, 5 April 1920, p.8, covered the first protest meeting.

29 The Dominion Labor Party was formed in 1918; candidates for school trustee were nominated at a labour convention, 6 October 1919. See WLN, 10 October 1919, p.1. A Miss McBeth, school teacher, was also endorsed by labour for the West Kildonan area. The debate on abolition of property qualifications raged in early 1920. See WLN, 16 January 1920, p.1; 23 January 1920, p.1; 27 February 1920, p.1; 5 March 1920, p.1 and 26 March 1920, p.1. Armstrong is quoted in WLN, 12 September 1919, p.8. Mrs. Alcin was attacked in the Free Press (Winnipeg), 21 November 1919, p.13. For information on Kirk, see FP, 27 November 1919, p.8; her firing is noted in WLN, 4 October 1918, p.1. On Hancox, see FP, 28 November 1919, p.21. The final vote is reported in WLN, 5 December 1919, p.1; Alcin beat Max Steinkoff 1,728 to 1,049. Kirk's 1920 victory is reported in WLN, 10 December 1920, p.4. For Kirk and Rowe's election to the DLP executive, see WLN, 12 March 1920, p.1. For examples of appeals to women to become active in labour politics, see Ivens: WLN, 6 September 1918, p.8; Bland: WLN, 5 September 1919, p.8; Winona Flett (Mrs. Dixon): WLN, 7 March 1919, p.1; Rowe: WLN, 27 February 1920, p.1. On the provincial election fo 1920, see Armstrong and Kirk's withdrawal in WLN, 16 April 1920, p.1 and Winona Flett's remarks at the labour rally in WLN, 25 June 1920, p.1. On Winnipeg's post-strike municipal elections, see J.E. Rea, "The Politics of Conscience: Winnipeg After the Strike," Historical Papers, Canadian Historical Association, 1971,276-88, and his "The Politics of Class: Winnipeg City Council, 1919-45," in Carl Berger and Ramsay Cook, eds. The West and the Nation (Toronto, 1976), 232-49. Neither article notes women candidates.