

May 9, 2019

**Lockout at Glencore's Smelter
in Belledune, New Brunswick**

Struggle Continues Against Glencore's Anti-Worker Concessionary Demands



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Lockout at Glencore's Smelter in Belledune, New Brunswick

Struggle Continues Against Glencore's Anti-Worker Concessionary Demands

May 8 marked the end of the second week of the Glencore Brunswick Smelter workers' job action in Belledune. The 281 production and maintenance workers, members of USW Local 7085, are united in action to defend their rights against the mining and metallurgy Glencore's demand for anti-worker concessions.

As is now becoming routine for global oligopolies such as Glencore to show their arrogance and refusal to negotiate, it locked out the workers before their announced strike was to begin in the

evening, under the hoax of protecting the safety of the plant. With the sudden and unannounced lockout, Glencore revealed that it had been long preparing to attack the workers. On April 24, the day it locked out the workers, the global monopoly sought a court order from the Court of Queen's Bench of New Brunswick, which it obtained on April 26, limiting the number of picketers to six at the entrances or exits of the smelter and at any other geographical location in New Brunswick where it conducts business. The court also ordered the workers not to obstruct in any way any movement of employees, customers, suppliers and others to and from the plant or to "harass" them, including a prohibition of taking photographs. Glencore soon followed up this court order obtaining a second one making it "illegal" for picketers to conceal their identity, including by covering their faces.



The global monopoly further revealed its intention to refuse to negotiate and provoke a strike or lockout by having already organized "strike security teams" that are reported to be housed in fancy hotels and provided with vehicles for the duration of the strike/lockout. The monopoly had also hired scab labour from Quebec to drive the trucks bringing mined concentrate into the smelter.

These conscious preparations are not the activity of a company with intentions of negotiating a contract that workers can find acceptable. The global oligopoly with the backing of the state and using its vast social wealth and power is showing its fangs and anti-worker hatred with this attempt to impose its dictate and drive down the working and living conditions of workers.

(Photos: USW District 6)



It's Our Turn -- No Concessions!



The locked-out New Brunswick smelter workers are not intimidated by the actions of Glencore. They have put the slogan "It's Our Turn -- No Concessions" on their website and are calling on the working people to unite behind their just cause. They say that they have already made huge concessions over the last three contracts, especially in the 2014 contract, just after the Glencore empire seized control of the former owners, Xstrata. The increased global power and the concessions reluctantly accepted by workers in recent contracts, workers say have emboldened the oligarchs not only to demand more and more but to crush the union, silence their voice and establish a labour relations climate marked by open hostility towards the workers and contempt for their health and safety.

"Years of sacrifices by workers and their families have not been reciprocated with good-faith behaviour by Glencore, at the bargaining table or in the workplace," said USW Local 7085 President Bart Dempsey. "For years our members have accepted concessions and worked with Glencore to help make our smelter a success. In return, Glencore has responded with a management culture that has become increasingly hostile towards its workers and, of course, demands for more concessions," he added.



Dempsey told *Workers' Forum* that experience has shown that in no way can workers entrust their health and safety to Glencore management. This has been proven once again in practice by the company's demand that the fulltime position of the union's health and safety representative be reduced to a parttime position and deprived of his current office in the plant to meet fellow workers.

Workers reject the company slander that workers with their resistance against further concessions are "disconnected from the global market in which the smelter is trying to survive." Workers have direct experience that concessions imposed by the company have worsened all aspects of life at the plant and in retirement and that those concessions have whetted the appetite of the beast for more. Besides, workers point out, they have no control over the global market, its mindless anti-people competition and the adventures of the oligopolies to realize their aim of narrow private profit. The anti-people aim and actions of the global oligopolies such as Alcoa, GM and Glencore have nothing to do with bringing prosperity to any nation. They merely enrich those whose unscrupulous swindles win out in the short-term and then they need another swindle to remain "in business." Workers can in no way base their aspirations, actions and demands for security and what belongs to them by right on the anarchy and violence which accompanies the global competition of the oligopolies. Glencore's refusal to negotiate is a form of violence as well. With the connivance of the courts and other state institutions, as well as governments, such narrow private interests extort what they want without any regard for the lives of the people whose safety they threaten. The workers' cause is just and deserves the support of all Canadians.

(Photos: USW District 6, WF)



Resistance to Arrogant Actions of Glencore



A contingent of USW workers from Glencore travelled to Glencore's AGM in Switzerland, May 9, 2019 to protest attacks on their rights.

Glencore smelter workers gave ample notice that their strike in defence of their rights was to begin the evening of April 24. Upon arriving for work in the morning of the strike, the global monopoly Glencore, without any notice, locked them out. The company began blocking workers from entering the plant without any official notice. This showed their intent to refuse to negotiate.

Refusing to negotiate and locking out workers when they refuse to accept the dictate of global monopoly is becoming a frequent tactic in attacking the rights of the working class. Global private empires, such as Glencore, use lockouts and state-organized attacks such as court injunctions to criminalize and intimidate workers and attempt to make them give up the just defence of their rights and well-being at work and in retirement, and their claim on what they produce which belongs to them by right.

The Belledune smelter workers, similar to others such as the ABI workers in Quebec, who have organized a grand solidarity march in Trois-Rivières for May 25, are facing these private global empires that have state-organized backing. Workers are finding they are not alone, isolated and without options in their struggle. They are organizing joint actions and reaching out to Canadians to find strength in numbers and to form the public opinion and solidarity they need to confront these global robber barons and their political representatives in government.

On May 9, a delegation of Glencore workers is in Zug, Switzerland on the occasion of the company's annual general meeting. The delegation is working with representatives of the IndustriALL Global Union, of which the United Steelworkers is an



affiliate. Together the unions are expressing their opposition to the anti-worker dictate of the global oligopoly building unity with fellow workers. They will also participate in the annual general meeting to protest the company's attacks on their health, safety and rights and press Glencore's global executives to take a stand in favour of a negotiated collective agreement acceptable to the workers.

(Photos: USW District 6, WF)



Sit-Ins and Occupations by New Brunswick Nursing Home Workers

Militant Action in Defence of Workers' Rights



On May 4, 2019 executive members of the NB Council of Nursing Home Unions end their occupation of the Fredericton office of New Brunswick's Minister of Social Development and continued to press for their demands through sit-ins at Cabinet members' constituency offices.

Nursing home workers in New Brunswick are stepping up their actions to obtain wages needed both to stop their growing impoverishment and to retain and attract workers to the sector. They have rejected the so-called mandate that the provincial government has decreed, according to which public bodies must hold wage increases to one per cent or less per year.

The Conservative government declaration of a mandate to attack the working class follows the same policy as that of the previous Liberal government. Nursing home workers have firmly rejected this and are determined to unite in action to break the mandate. The provincial government in its retrogressive and provocative propaganda is spreading the neo-liberal falsehood that nursing home workers and all public sector workers are a cost to the province that has to be reduced and not an essential asset in humanizing society and contributing precious value to the economy.



Executive members occupy Minister of Social Development's office, May 1, 2019.

Day and night from May 1 to May 4, executive members of the NB Council of Nursing Home Unions occupied the Fredericton office of New Brunswick's Minister of Social Development. During the occupation, members of the Council and supporters organized demonstrations outside and sent in food and drinks. Security prevented media from entering the building to talk to the

Council members so press scrums were held through the windows.

One demand of the workers occupying the office was to talk, even by phone, with either the Premier or the Minister to reaffirm the stand of the workers in defence of their right to improvements in their wages and working conditions, a stand from which they will not retreat. The workers were also asking for a copy of the new offer that the government says it has prepared, which allegedly improves on the previous offer that the workers firmly rejected. This conversation never took place.

The Minister publicly denounced the occupation as a "bullying" tactic without commenting on, apologizing for, or better still eliminating, his government's mandate and use of police powers to bully all public sector workers.

Another aim of the occupation was to denounce the never-ending state-organized judicial saga being used against the workers to deny them their right to strike. Workers are being blocked from exercising their right to withdraw their labour in support of their just demands. Denying workers' right to engage in job actions also delays finding real solutions to the problems that workers and residents of nursing homes are facing.

The latest event in the judicial saga is an April 25 decision by the New Brunswick Court of Appeal. The decision sided with the province by overturning a lower court ruling rejecting the original court order denying workers their right to strike. The judge in that decision ruled the punitive order was doing irreparable harm to the workers. The government immediately appealed and had its anti-worker dictate upheld.

Another legal process is also underway reviewing the constitutionality of the *Essential Services in Nursing Homes Act*, which is to be heard on May 24.^[1] In the meantime nursing home workers are denied their right to strike until that review is completed and serious problems are left unresolved.

Workers are fed up with these endless court cases. They have made clear for a long time that what they want is negotiations in which their demands and concerns are heard and respect is shown for the work they do. Their aim is to achieve working conditions and wages acceptable to themselves and to find real solutions to real problems in the sector. A strike is not their aim. At the same time, they need to be able to withdraw their capacity to work if that is what is required to push for their demands. They have even proposed to the government that binding arbitration be used to settle the dispute. The government responded to this proposal with the provocation that it would agree to submitting the dispute to binding arbitration on condition that the arbitrator abide by the one per cent dictate on wage increases, thus defeating the entire purpose of arbitration.

The executive members of the Council decided on May 4, to end their occupation of the Minister's Office and switch to regional actions of one-day sit-ins in constituency offices of Cabinet Ministers. Nursing home workers organized actions at eight Ministers' offices in cities across New Brunswick on Monday May 6, the day of the week Ministers are supposed to be in their constituency to meet their constituents. Some Ministers left their offices before the sit-ins to avoid any contact with the workers while others closed their offices for the day. Regardless, workers used the occasion to denounce the government's attacks on public sector workers and nursing home workers in particular.

The 4,100 nursing home workers have been trying to negotiate a contract since 2016. Negotiations are scheduled for May 11 and the workers are demanding progress to achieve wages and working conditions acceptable to themselves and to humanize the sector for the sake of those in their care.



Workers participate in actions at eight cabinet minister's constituency offices, May 6, 2019.

Note

1. At the end of 2018, the New Brunswick Labour and Employment Board ruled that the *Essential Services in Nursing Homes Act* violated the right to collective bargaining for employees. According to the ruling, the designation of essential care services in the event of a strike does not apply to nursing homes. The government intervened to seek a judicial review of this decision, which has yet to be heard.

(Photos: CUPE New Brunswick, G. Ross)



100th Anniversary of the Halifax General Strike A Militant Tradition of Workers' Struggles in the Atlantic Provinces

- Tony Seed -



May First, international working class day, marked the 100th anniversary of the Halifax General Strike of 1919. Events in Halifax in 1919 and after must be seen within the context of both regional, national and international developments and working-class activity. Between 1916 and 1925 the Maritimes experienced unparalleled levels of strike activity. Significantly this upsurge was not confined to the coal mining communities of the region. Economic militancy often translated into political action. Miners in Cape Breton, Cumberland, and Pictou counties, steelworkers in Sydney, and industrial workers in Amherst and New Glasgow participated in the upsurge of radicalism seen across the country. In March 1919 a "great mass meeting" in Sydney endorsed a resolution by Nova Scotia Federation of Labour organizer C.C. Dane for a strike of all Nova Scotia workers if the provincial government failed to enact legislation for an eight-hour day.[1]

The Halifax General Strike

The Halifax General Strike targeted war profiteering and super-exploitation of the construction trades in the wake of the Halifax Explosion of December 6, 1917.

When the explosion took place, official figures suspected by many to be understated, say 1,963 residents of the city were killed, another 9,000 injured and 199 blinded -- comprising more than one-fifth of a total population of less than 50,000 -- of whom 5,000 were soldiers and sailors, not including those convalescing in military hospitals from wounds suffered in Europe. Between 20,000 and 25,000 Haligonians were left homeless and destitute, including 10,000 children.

The recounting of the Explosion tends to deny the causal link between the disaster and the stepped up exploitation of the working class and its impoverishment and resistance at that time. For example, under the pretext of dealing with the consequences of the Explosion, the rich recruited unskilled migrant labour, including from China, to replace the fallen longshoremen to keep Halifax functioning as a war port and to drive down wages, split the workers' solidarity, and break down the closed union shop. In February 1918, an Ontario labour paper, the *Industrial Banner*, referred to a group of Chinese labourers who had frozen to death en route to Halifax and criticized the injustice of employing foreign labour when "[h]ardly a day passes but news comes of men and women being notified that their services are no longer required."

Picking themselves up from the disaster, the Halifax workers rose against the injustices, urban land grabs and profiteering from the misery prevailing after the Explosion by the unscrupulous men of property. This culminated in a general strike of over 1,100 building trades workers launched on May Day, 1919.

Called at the time "The Big Strike," it was the largest strike in the history of Halifax. Along with being the international day of working class unity and solidarity, May First was the traditional date for establishing new wage rates in Halifax.

Impulse to the Development of the Workers' Press

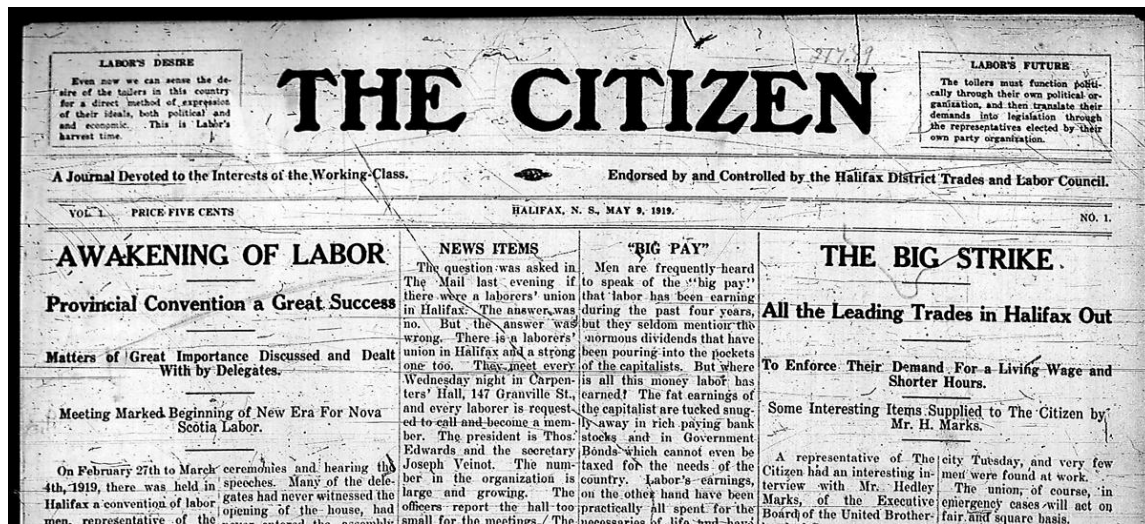
On May 9, 1919, under the auspices of the Halifax Trades and Labour Council, Halifax workers began publishing a weekly newspaper, significantly named *The Citizen*, capable of "presenting labour's case to the public." On its front page, it noted:

"It is a regrettable and serious thing, but it seems only too true that the large daily newspapers of Canada and, in fact, the press generally, have entirely ceased to stand for the people's interests. They appear to have become tied up with the big interests. They have become advocates of measures and doctrines which, in other countries, have produced military and political domination and subversion of the people's rights.

"Organized labour, during the long struggle for the recognition of its rights, has always stood firm

for liberty of speech and action for all classes. This is something which the capitalistic class cannot claim. In fact, the only hope for restoring freedom of speech and action in this country lies in the labour movement. All who believe in free speech, therefor, should support labour."

The Citizen advocated "the principles of independent political action." The Halifax Labour Party was revived by the Halifax Trades & Labour Council, inviting all "workers, whether organized or unorganized, mental or manual regardless of race, sex, creed or vocation." On July 27, 1920, the Independent Labour Party, in alliance with the United Farmers of Nova Scotia, won the greatest electoral support for any left-wing party in the history of the Maritimes with 11 seats, five being labour. Cape Breton itself sent four labour MLAs to Halifax, also with the highest majority.



The Amherst Strike

On May 20, 1919, the locally organized industrial union, the independent Amherst Federation of Labour, called "a general strike" of organized labour in that town, partly in sympathy with the workers of the Canadian Car and Foundry Company who had failed to achieve parity with the Montreal branch, and partly to back the demands for an eight-hour day, union recognition, and improved working conditions in individual plants. With two exceptions, the three-week strike included 4,000 workers in all the town's major industries: foundries, engineering works, textile mills, shoes, luggage, and wood-working factories, and even the local garage. The Amherst Federation of Labour wrote that Nolan Eilly "directed all negotiations with the various companies and organized daily rallies for information and agitational purposes. At these meetings local labour leaders promoted the One Big Union (OBU) as the only organization with the strength and determination to confront capitalism on local and national issues." [2]

Also in May 1919, more than 15,000 paper-mill workers in Canada and the U.S., who produced 60 per cent of all newsprint, struck against a 30 per cent wage cut.

The Halifax Shipyard Strike

High levels of struggle were developed by shipyard workers in Halifax and coal miners and steel workers in Cape Breton against private absentee British owners.

A still larger strike of shipyard workers broke out in June 1920. The shipyards were now owned by the newly-formed British Empire Steel Corporation (BESCO), the largest industrial consortium in Canada. At the time, the Sydney steel plant was the largest in Canada. Cape Breton produced 45 per cent of all Canadian coal production. [3]

Centring upon Halifax Shipyards Limited, the strike affected eight companies, an average of 2,000 workers, and lasted 52 working days. With the total loss of 104,000 man-days it accounted for over 12 per cent of the total strike days in Canada during 1920.

It would remain the largest single manufacturing strike to involve one community's industrial workers until after World War II.

The International Typographical Union strike, which lasted from May 1921 until August 1924 to establish the eight-hour day, was actually the biggest skilled-labour strike.



The Citizen, June 4, 1920; June 18, 1920 (click to enlarge).

The Cape Breton Resistance

In the 1920s, exercises of state power against the working class became a regular feature of Cape Breton strikes. The collectives of steel workers, coal miners (many of whom were Gaelic speakers), and the Black community of Whitney Pier of African-Caribbean origin were all in motion.

In August 1922, a strike of the coal miners was declared in which the resolution was put forth that:

"We proclaim openly to all the world that we are out for a complete overthrow of the capitalist system and of the capitalist, peaceably if we may; forceable if we must; and we call on all workers, soldiers and minor law officers in Canada to join us in liberating labour."[4]

The 12,000 coal miners resisted a one-third wage reduction imposed by BESCO with a major strike involving new tactics: restriction of output by one-third, and the enforcement of a 100 per cent strike; all workers left the mines. Ottawa turned Cape Breton into an armed camp, deploying one-third of the Canadian army. Ottawa deployed 4,000 members of the Royal Canadian Regiment with 18-pound field guns to maintain "order" around BESCO facilities. The British Navy deployed a battleship from Newfoundland waters to suppress their militant struggle to organize into the union of their choice. Nova Scotia officials requested an additional 2,000 troops, British battleships then in

Newfoundland waters, and an airplane squadron. One commanding officer even called for air strikes. Cape Breton County was declared a police district, with a 1,000-men police force authorized.[5]



Royal Canadian Dragoons occupy Cape Breton in 1922.

In 1923 "The Red Flag," written by Irishman James Connelly, was sung at the first Cape Breton May Day Parade in Glace Bay. James B. McLachlan, the mass leader of the Cape Breton coal miners was also a member of the newly-formed Communist Party and one of the most significant Canadian labour leaders. He described the May Day Parade:

"May Day was held in Glace Bay this year for the first time. Four thousand workers, clear eyed and triumphant, marched with flag and banner in that parade. All day there was a steady downpour of icy rain but it was neither wet enough nor cold enough to dampen the fine spirit of these working men and women marchers. [...] With song and speech, with comradely greetings these four thousand men and women spent one gloriously free eight hours away from the eye of the boss and his heart-breaking job which barely provides them and their children with bread. A glorious day which made one's blood run warmer and faster with the hopeful thrill of the new life when all of the days of the year shall belong to labour and when the accursed words 'master and boss' shall be banished from the earth along with the thing which these represent. On May Day we forgot the barriers of nationalism erected by the masters of bread and sent words of fraternal greetings to the struggling workers of every land. The workers of this land are our comrades and brothers, the capitalists of this land our robber enemies. The complete solidarity of the former is our hope, the complete extermination of the latter our aim. Long live May Day! Long live the solidarity of the World's workers!"[6]

In June 1923 the coal miners struck in solidarity with the steelworkers of Sydney, who were fighting for the recognition of their union.

On June 30, the first of many troop trains was sent to Sydney, including an armoured gondola piled high with sand bags and bristling with machine guns. Provincial police (or "Armstrong's Army") were again sent to Cape Breton and ran riot on Victoria Road on July 1 assaulting residents as they returned home from church. They were soon joined by federal troops. This came to be known as

Cape Breton's infamous "Peterloo" or "Bloody Sunday."

J.B. McLachlan circulated a notice urging other mining unions to walk out in support. Branding the Nova Scotia government "the guilty and responsible party" for the attack, he called on his fellow unionists "to spread the fight against (Premier) Armstrong to every mine in Nova Scotia." Eventually, the miners closed not only Cape Breton and mainland mines, but District 18 in Alberta came out as well in support of the steelworkers to protest the renewed use of armed force in the industrial area. Many miners had served in the war that ended only five years before the strike. Many were prepared to fight an enemy that they considered as threatening to their survival as any they had faced across No-Man's Land in Europe.

Glace Bay refused to pay the cost of the military forces, as provided by the *Militia Act*. "The larger mining towns were no longer company towns; they elected labour candidates, who engaged in protracted disputes with the coal company over taxes and assessments and services, and supported the union in times of crisis." [7]

"Red" Dan Livingstone, miners' president, and J.B. McLachlan, the secretary-treasurer, [8] were arrested and jailed. "Fighting Jim," as he was known in the press, was convicted in December 1923 on trumped-up charges of three counts of sedition -- unlawfully inciting public disorder or promoting hatred of the government -- and jailed for two years at the Dorchester Penitentiary for articles written in the *Maritime Labour Herald*, of which he was editor. It was little more than a show trial: Attorney General Walter J. O'Hearn, who prosecuted, insisted on a Halifax trial for fear sympathetic Cape Breton jurors would acquit someone with the courage to champion their cause. In his instructions to the jury, Justice Humphrey Mellish of the Supreme Court, a former coal company lawyer, could barely disguise his distaste for McLachlan and the Marxist ideals he espoused. Legal historian Barry Cahill has labeled it a "gross miscarriage of justice."

McLachlan's lawyers managed to have one count dismissed on appeal -- the charge of publishing seditious material in Halifax, since it had emerged at trial that a BESCO official had leaked the notice to the Halifax newspapers. He was sentenced to two years in prison but paroled after serving less than five months. His death in 1937, when he was in his late 60s, was blamed on a lung ailment picked up while confined to the damp cells of Dorchester Penitentiary.

Notes

1. Ernest R. Forbes, *The Maritime Rights Movement, 1919-1927*, p. 41.
2. Reilly, J. Nolan. "The General Strike in Amherst, Nova Scotia, 1919," *Acadiensis*, Vol. IX, No. 2, Spring 1980, pp. 56-77.
3. Roy Wolvin and a cadre of former Beaverbrook associates combined Nova Scotia Steel and Coal, Dominion Coal, Dominion Iron and Steel, Dominion Steel, a Halifax shipyard, and several other companies into BESCO. Such monopolies arose from the merger of industrial and finance capital. They acquired tremendous individual power but beyond their private power, the monopolies had the full might of the Canadian state and its entire military, judicial, financial and other resources behind them in the battle with the working class. The post WWI period was awash in excess productive capacity. BESCO was determined to save costs by cutting wages; the workers, the producers of wealth, were determined to resist. The venture ultimately collapsed, as it tried to force ever greater concessions from labour.

See also Suzanne Morton, "Labourism and Economic Action: The Halifax Shipyards Strike of 1920," *Labour/Le Travail*, Volume 22 / Volume 22e (1988).

4. Mellor, "United We Stand, Divided We Fall," *A Study of Cape Breton Unionism*, 1971, p. 14.

5. In "A Boy Who Went to War," Tom Doucette writes that "BESCO owned the houses and barracks (for single men), stores, hospital, and all utilities, even the town streets. There was little private ownership of property. BESCO's General Manager lived in a company-owned wooden mansion that looked like something out of the deep south. The company built it on an entire block overlooking the main street. His life and comforts were on par with his army counterpart: a General." People were dying of malnutrition:

Infant Mortality Rate	1921	1922
National rate	88.1	86.8
Sydney Mines	140.0	156.3
New Waterford	148.1	159.4
Sydney	175.9	175.8
Glace Bay	305.9	250.0

6. *Maritime Labour Herald*, May 5, 1923, p.1.

7. Dawn Fraser, *Echoes From Labour's War*, p.19.

8. James B. McLachlan, a coal miner of Irish-Scottish origin, had come forward to reject the old ways of trade unionism and promote the closest possible bonds and increasing unity of the oppressed of all nationalities. He held that without such a unity a victorious struggle against the general oppression is impossible. The old craft unions built on individual trades and in isolation from other members of the working class were not consistent with the demands of the times. In also rejecting company unionism, McLachlan advocated and built in practice a mass trade unionism that attempted to mobilize all miners regardless of nationality, immigrant status, state-organized racism, education, specific trade or any other aspect that interferes with organizing and uniting workers as workers.

For more information on J.B. McLachlan's trial, see David Frank, *J.B. McLachlan: A Biography* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1999), Chapter 8; Barry Cahill, "Howe (1835), Dixon (1920) and McLachlan (1923): Comparative Perspectives on the Legal History of Sedition," *University of New Brunswick Law Journal*, Vol. 45 (1996), pp. 281-307.



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