

CHAPTER 3

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HARRY BRYAN - A MAN OF FANATICAL CONVICTIONS

THE HISTORY OF THE LAKEHEAD before the First World War is replete with all manner of labour conflict and attempts by union organizers to improve the lot of the working class. The nature of employment in Port Arthur and Fort William did not make that task any easier - the giant and very powerful Canadian Pacific and Canadian Northern railways dominated the business landscape in the towns, while other formidable institutions like the Bell Telephone Company and the railway controlled grain elevators were significant Everests to be climbed by ill-equipped unionists. On a lesser scale, there were local carpenters, ironworkers and others who also required the organizational skills of union people to ameliorate their condition through decent wages and basic benefits. That became ever more imperative as the twin cities participated in the economic boom that characterized early twentieth century Canadian development. All manner of skilled and unskilled workers poured into the Lakehead to take advantage of the employment opportunities presented.

Nowhere in Canada was the trade union movement very strong as employers and governments practiced labour relations behind the barrel of a gun, but in what today constitutes the city of Thunder Bay, it was even weaker than elsewhere. Indeed, until 1902, organized labour was practically non-existent. It was not until Harry Bryan came to the Lakehead in that year that organizational activity began in earnest in a number of trades, although others had organized some workers, like the railway men, during the previous decade. Bryan exemplified an era that would see the creation of a vibrant and diverse socialist culture in the region.¹ As a union man he could count his success by the number of unions chartered - as many, some claim, as 22; however, the number is in dispute.² Because of his striking achievement, his former associates often referred to him as the father of the labour movement in Thunder Bay.

Bryan was born in England in 1863, emigrated with his family in 1871 to Niagara Falls, Ontario and later moved to St. Thomas. There, he received his first experience in trade union organization through the Knights of Labour in the United States.³ They had been established in Philadelphia in the early 1860s, and had spread north by 1867. At their peak in the 1870s, the Knights could claim some 700,000 members worldwide including about 12,000 in Canada. Initially, at least, they were a group possessed of strong moral overtones, organizing all workers, regardless of skill or craft and including Blacks and women. Their philosophy attracted the young Bryan

and he worked for the Knights during the later 1870s and 1880s as an organizer. They anticipated what would be called the Social Gospel movement, in harmony with Bryan's strong Methodist upbringing and radical ideology that would put him considerably to the left of mainstream Canadian society and Canadian Methodism. However, the Knights of Labour died a violent death in the U.S. in 1886, although some locals did persevere in Canada until 1902.

The year before the demise of the Knights, Harry Bryan had moved to Cleveland, Ohio, and joined the American Federation of Labor (AFL). There, he was employed as a street railway man, quickly becoming president of their newly organized union. He also became a "volunteer" AFL organizer as early as 1885. As Jean Morrison has pointed out, such a status probably meant that Bryan did not rely on his organizational activity for a living.⁴ In that capacity, he became an associate of Samuel Gompers and was sent by the AFL President throughout the American northeast, organizing unions and becoming involved in strikes in the Pennsylvania coalfields, New York and St. Louis.⁵ In total, Bryan spent more than 15 years active in the United States, coming north only when he was black-listed in Cleveland sometime in 1901 or 1902. He and his family had no choice but to leave. With no other prospects, Bryan was convinced by the AFL leadership to return to Canada to organize workers at the Lakehead.

One may reasonably speculate that he was drawn by the region's extraordinary growth rates at the turn of the century. Its location at the head of Lake Superior combined with nearby natural resources and the phenomenal expansion of the Canadian wheat economy, made Lakehead a magnet for immigrants. Within the cities the railway yards, coal docks, grain elevators, and ship building yards provided the bulk of the employment for labourers (both skilled and unskilled) and were the driving force of the regional economy until the 1920s when pulp and paper mills would join the mix.⁶ The vast majority of workers in these occupations when Bryan arrived belonged to no union.

Bryan's declaration to the editor of the *Fort William Times-Journal* in 1903 that he was going to organize all the trades and workers into the AFL was more than bluster. The region presented him with the type of challenge he craved.⁷ "The year 1903," according to Jean Morrison, "would herald many other firsts for labour: the first strikes organized and settled locally, a publicly acclaimed first Labour Day parade, and the first labour council, a Central Labour Union, affiliated to the American Federation of Labor."⁸

Bryan's dedication to the political movement was as important as the unions he helped establish.⁹ Ideologically, Bryan did not blame capitalists for the plight of workers. He believed the system needed to be changed and warned local workers that the capitalists were as much victims as workers. For this reason, he argued, as long as capitalists were willing to change they should be given a chance to co-operate.¹⁰ This manifested itself in a belief in municipal ownership of public services and utilities.¹¹ As Anthony Rasporich and Thorold J. Tronrud have suggested, "to be an enemy of

municipal ownership was political death in either town.”¹² As Steven High remarks, the extent of municipal ownership in Port Arthur was virtually unequalled (perhaps with the exception of Fort William) in North America.¹³

While Bryan had laid aside his Methodism by the time he returned to Canada, he did join the Canadian Socialist League (CSL) upon his arrival in Fort William. As the labour historian, Martin Robin, has noted, the CSL “advertised a mild and palatable Christian Socialism ... [and defined socialism] as applied Christianity.”¹⁴ Bryan agreed with the League’s platform that only when labour controlled the electoral system could a truly popular government be realized. In that way he was as much a part of the Canadian radical tradition as was the Methodist minister and future founder of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation, James Shaver Woodsworth, then operating his mission in north Winnipeg and preaching a humanist philosophy. Later, Bryan actively practiced his beliefs, standing as a labour candidate for the District of Thunder Bay in various federal and provincial elections.

The American Federation of Labor, so long dominated by the conservative Samuel Gompers, espoused a fundamentally different ethos. It eschewed political involvement, concentrating almost exclusively on bargaining for wages and benefits for its craft-dominated membership. Gompers disliked socialists, claiming that he was “entirely at variance with [their] philosophy”; economically they were “unsound”, socially they were “wrong”, and industrially they were “an impossibility.”¹⁵ Eugene Debs, leader of the American Socialist Party and a significant influence on Harry Bryan, Gompers denounced as a “leader of irregular movements and lost causes.”¹⁶ Clearly, by 1901, when Bryan left for Canada, if not before, there were significant differences of opinion between him and his friend Gompers.

However, when he came to Northwestern Ontario his intention was not to organize labour, but rather to homestead near Dorion. The Ontario government was then in the process of offering free land grants to prospective settlers to open up the region, and, as Bryan had also been blacklisted in southern Ontario, his options were definitely limited. Nevertheless, once in the region he must have been struck by the obvious inequities in labour’s condition. When forced by circumstance to move to Fort William in search of work, he also took up the organizational mantle, which he had so recently cast aside.

Although in the city itself for a relatively short span of three years, he had a marked effect on the local labour movement through his efforts to give the labouring men of the Lakehead a voice in the workplace. While employed in the construction of the addition to the CPR’s Elevator “D”, he undertook to unionize his co-workers, with the result being the International Bridge and Ironworkers Union, Local 58, chartered by the AFL. And that, Bryan announced to the Fort William *Daily Times-Journal* in January 1903, was only the beginning; “Organized labour [was] about to take possession

of Fort William.” No trade, he maintained, would be immune to his organizational ability.¹⁷ In Bryan’s mind at least, the days of total business domination of working class lives were numbered.

In pursuit of that objective, he led his newly formed union in a strike in late February 1903 against the contractor for Elevator “D”. The basic issues were wages and piecework. With respect to the former, some riveters were earning as little as 30 cents per day, while Bryan called piece work “the whip in the hands of the capitalists and used to exploit labor, always taking advantage of the maximum day’s work to establish the minimum day’s wage.”¹⁸ He and the Ironworkers were successful and the strike was over on 3 March. The results favoured the union - piecework was gone in favour of an hourly wage and rates of pay were increased.

The success of the strike was the best advertisement Bryan could hope for and he was soon organizing other unions, some of which followed the path blazed by the Ironworkers. For example, another Bryan-chartered union, the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners, struck in early June 1903 over the issue of the union shop. They also were successful. While continuing his organizational efforts, he also established the Central Labour Union (CLU), for which he acted as business agent. It operated as a labour centre for the Lakehead and as an educational forum for working people.

As well, the CLU urged its constituents to get involved in politics. It followed its own counsel in early 1904 when L.L. Peltier, a future mayor of Fort William, was nominated as the labour candidate of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) to contest the upcoming federal election.¹⁹ Bryan was instrumental in the process, and chaired the nomination meeting when Peltier was chosen. The manifesto put out by the ILP stressed themes that were dear to Bryan’s heart. Among these were the community of interest between society and labour, the right of labour to organize and the necessity of publicly-owned municipal services. In particular, the manifesto and the Central Labour Union were solidly behind the efforts of Fort William to establish its own telephone system against the decidedly hostile Bell Telephone Company.

Unfortunately for Bryan, Peltier and the Independent Labour Party, the Liberal, James Conmee, a populist long known for his moderate pro-workingman record, proved to be too attractive to voters and Peltier, perhaps predictably, placed a distant third. Bryan himself ran provincially as a labour candidate the following year with no real hope of winning. Nevertheless labour he did receive 14% of the final vote, representing organized labour’s entry into direct politics.²⁰ As the elections had gone badly for labour forces, so too had Harry Bryan’s career as a labour organizer in Fort William. Jean Morrison suggests that his undoing was to organize some civic employees, the street railway men, telephone operators, and electric light workers. Given the hostility that evoked among local politicians, (and probably among the population at large), combined with the traditional antipathy directed against him by the business sector, he was

blacklisted once again.²¹ Moreover, Bryan was plagued with frivolous complaints against him, like a trumped-up trespassing charge that was later dismissed.²²

As well, Bryan and his family suffered from the emotional strain imposed by such a campaign directed against him by better-placed enemies. For example, during the latter part of his residence in Fort William, his children never understood why he stayed home during the day and went out at night. The reason, of course, was that he feared for his safety.²³ Further, when he was forced to move, his two eldest daughters were compelled to leave their jobs. In the words of his third daughter, Ethel, her two sisters “never forgot” what had occurred and “never forgave” their father.²⁴

Official and business hostility, combined with Bryan’s need to support his family, meant that he left Fort William to take up a rather peripatetic existence for a number of years. First the family moved to a bush homestead in the Slate River valley south of Fort William for a few years, then on to O’Connor and finally to Kakabeka Falls to the west. Tragedy dogged their footsteps, as Bryan’s wife died at the age of 46 during the family’s short stay at O’Connor, perhaps worn out by the stress of having a union organizer for a husband and the tremendous sacrifice that entailed. In Kakabeka, despite being blacklisted, Bryan obtained a job in the powerhouse of the generating station on the Kaministiquia River through the good offices of an old school friend, plant superintendent William Robinson. However, it appears that Bryan did not attempt to organize the workers at the Falls, in part one suspects, because of the necessity to support his children. He left Kakabeka in 1909 upon the death of his father in Dorion, where he now settled to care for his widowed mother.

While there, Bryan continued his education work among his colleagues, holding Sunday meetings to expound upon the Socialist way and to develop his critique of society. Among some of the group, at least, he had a not insignificant influence. He also “continued to influence the labour movement of the district through such organizations as the Socialist Party of Canada (SPC) and the Social Democratic Party.”²⁵ For example, the establishment of the branches of the SPC at the Lakehead coincided with Harry Bryan’s return to Port Arthur and Fort William in 1906. Bryan was the leading member of the four-person delegation that represented those organizations that had split from the SPC in 1910 during the meetings that would ultimately lead to the formation of the Social Democratic Party of Canada. In fact, it was Bryan who persuaded delegates to hold one of their meetings at the Lakehead in late December 1911 and to hold the formal unity discussions that led ultimately to the formation of the Social Democratic Party of Canada (SDPC).²⁶

By 1914, the notion that socialists and violence were synonymous had been implanted within the minds of many in the communities of Port Arthur and Fort William. So too had the role of immigrants within socialist organizations and their role in radicalizing local union activities. Coming to grips with these two factors had allowed Harry Bryan and others to

successfully mobilize workers to protest their conditions and had resulted at times in real electoral successes. SDPers such as Bryan and former candidate W. Welsh took a lead role during the 1914 provincial election campaign in Port Arthur and in the nomination of the SDPC local's secretary, S.F.H. Sangster.²⁷ Sangster polled a respectable 838 votes, the second largest total in the province and 13% of the SDPC's provincial total.²⁸

Bryan's role in the growing militancy of workers at the Lakehead is apparent in an incident in early May 1916. Emboldened by reports of the activities of British socialists and the severe labour shortage within wartime Canada, on the morning of 28 April 1916, residents of Fort William awoke to find 60 workers at CPR Elevator D in Fort William on strike over wages and working conditions. Soon after the workers in Fort William walked off the job, rumors began to spread throughout the two cities that a general strike was imminent.²⁹ Bryan's participation, as evidenced by newspaper reports, did little to calm the fears of officials in both the twin cities and Ottawa. When strikers were urged by H.S. Hood of the Department of Labour to return to work using the process outlined in the *Industrial Disputes Investigation Act*, Bryan, long considered by the department to be a socialist agitator, dissuaded them from taking this course of action.³⁰ Speaking in the Trades and Labour Hall on Finlayson Street, he advised strikers not to go back to work until their demands were met. He also called upon workers in both communities to join in the struggle.³¹ Within two days, the strike spread to include another 160 shovelers at the Grain Growers' and Eastern Terminal Elevators and the Ogilvie Flour Mill in Fort William. The government and Thunder Bay Elevators in Port Arthur also ceased to operate.³² Blame was solely placed on the strikers who were described as "foreign labour-class" and "socialists," Harry Bryan chief among them.³³

Despite open musing by newspapers that the strike could lead to a shortage of rail cars throughout the west and hamper the transcontinental shipment of goods, officials from the CPR refused to negotiate with the strikers at its elevators.³⁴ This stalemate continued until, on the fifth day of the strike, 150 truckers at the CNR docks joined the shovelers.³⁵ Concerned, the federal Minister of Labour sent his Deputy Minister from Winnipeg to assess the situation personally. Negotiations followed, but workers remained steadfast in their demands. It was the opinion of the company that the breach between them and the workers was widening; however, they assured strikers that negotiations would continue in good faith.³⁶

During the labour unrest that became commonplace on the dockyards at the Lakehead, Bryan frequently counseled strikers that they should only go back to work if officials met all of their demands.³⁷ Bryan's qualities of leadership and idealism are suggested through his role. The local labour councils had been unwilling to take a lead role and, with the collapse of the local branch of the SDPC, strikers were left without political guidance. Notwithstanding his efforts, the strike ended 4 May by a vote of 80 to 40 (a

lop-sided result that can be explained by the out-migration of many of the more radical elements). The hours and wages for both the truckers and the shovelers remained unchanged. As Bryan predicted, the government elevator in Port Arthur only took back 23 of the 40 strikers while the full staffs of the elevators in Fort William returned.³⁸

During the First World War, Bryan more often than not became the regional voice of the anti-conscription movement amongst the working class. For example, in January 1917, workers rallied to the banner of the SDPC at a meeting about the National Service Bureau in Port Arthur and its plans for a manpower survey, accurately interpreted as a first step towards a conscription policy. Speakers asked why, at the outbreak of the war, they had not been consulted if Canada should enter. "The government ignored us then and has done so since," Bryan declared, "except when they wanted to use us for their purposes." "How many of you are willing not to sign the cards and go behind the bars if necessary?," he asked the crowd. "To be behind them would not be much more a form of slavery than that we are now in." To those who stood up and began to cheer, Bryan said: "[T]his was the kind of spirit that will make them [the government] sit up and take notice."³⁹ Bryan, quoting from a speech made by German socialists to the Reichstag, told those present that "it is the duty of workers to fight the tyranny of government in their own country. Because a man is born on a piece of land which he never owns is no reason for his having to fight for it." Supporting conscription, he argued, "means that we favor putting a debt on the heads of our children. They will have to pay the national debt when we are dead."⁴⁰

Following the war, Bryan would play an important role in ushering in the changes that occurred at the Lakehead. It appears that after his experience at Kakabeka Falls, Bryan drifted further leftward, welcoming the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia in 1917 and being caught up in the events surrounding the Winnipeg General Strike and One Big Union (OBU) debate in 1919. As William Holder, a former organizer for the OBU remarks, Bryan was "a guiding light" for many during this period.⁴¹

For example, in May 1919 many workers at the Lakehead, inspired by events in Winnipeg and restless with the leadership of such craft unionists, turned to Harry Bryan for guidance. Bryan organized those workers in favour of supporting the Winnipeg strikers and began to hold separate meetings to hear presentations by delegates from the General Strike committee and formulate tactics to have their grievances heard and acted upon. For example, the same week that the Fort William and Port Arthur Trades and Labour Council announced their non-committal resolution, Bryan chaired a closed meeting that was held in the Corona Theatre in Fort William to hear a delegate from the Winnipeg Strike Committee.⁴² He spoke to a full house, and received an encouraging response; with Bryan's encouragement, the assembled workers passed resolutions favouring an immediate general strike, and bringing the issue to the urgent attention of the trades and labour councils in the twin cities.⁴³

When the One Big Union (OBU) was established at the Lakehead, Bryan was one of the union's leading voices. Bryan, though, did not merely follow the dictates of the union's leadership. He opposed, for example, those initiatives of the OBU he believed ran counter to the desires of workers in the region.⁴⁴ In opposition to the OBU's policy of "direct action" through a crippling general strike, Bryan remained committed to a lifetime of espousing political activity as the only permanent way to change society. For a very short time in 1919, he was catapulted into the position of Sudbury organizer for the Lumber Workers Industrial Union of the OBU, despite his disagreement over policy.

At the Lakehead, a Central Labour Council was formed under his direction consisting of representatives from both Fort William and Port Arthur. The decision to hold the OBU's Second National Convention in 1920 in Port Arthur also had a lot to do with Bryan's leadership. While this conference would result in a cataclysmic split in the OBU — which the lumber workers figured prominently in the issue to reorganize the OBU along geographic rather than industrial lines — Bryan continued to be the glue that kept the OBU in the region together despite growing regional disputes amongst socialists.⁴⁵

Between 1920 and 1922, Bryan traveled extensively and used every connection to the labour movement at his disposal to keep workers engaged and personally arranged for speakers such as Joe Knight to come to the area. While many Finnish lumber workers had become dissatisfied with the OBU, Bryan persuaded many others to remain and encouraged members of the Fort William Ukrainian community, such as Eric Holm, to fill vacant positions on the district executive. Bryan also arranged for individuals to speak on issues relating to Soviet Russia. He was responsible for the collections taken in both Port Arthur and Fort William for relief initiatives such as the Soviet Russia and Ukraine Medical Relief. Bryan himself frequently spoke on issues dealing with Soviet Russia and its comparison to Canada.⁴⁶

Bryan had never been comfortable with syndicalist ideas, taking the side of those in favour of reorganizing the OBU in terms geographic rather than along industrial lines. Regionally, the movement was a spent force by 1922. Even its most ardent organizers, including Bryan, were by then looking for alternatives.⁴⁷ Despite some limited participation in a few strikes during the 1920s, the OBU both nationally and locally had become little more than "a weak protest movement, a symbol of a revolutionary threat, and after 1929 something even less."⁴⁸

With the establishment of the Communist Party of Canada (CPC) in 1922, he soon left the OBU, having found an organization much more in keeping with his ideas. Regionally, Bryan had been at the centre of the conflict within the OBU at the convention in 1920. Even before breaking ties with the OBU, the events and ideology emanating from Russia and the failure of the past organizations to make a lasting impact on the working class had caused him to reconsider what he believed. Bryan along with

Finnish union organizer Amos Tobias (A.T.) Hill met other like-minded workers that spring in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario and formed, under the aegis of the newly established Workers' Party of Canada (WPC), the Lumber Workers' Industrial Union of Canada (LWIUC).⁴⁹ Bryan was appointed its first secretary-organizer. However, a period of inactivity followed when longtime eastern Ontario lumber worker Ed Kuusela replaced Bryan for yet undetermined reasons months later.⁵⁰ Kuusela's efforts focused mostly on the Sudbury region and little organizing occurred in Northwestern Ontario.⁵¹

Communist activities at the Lakehead received a boost when Bryan moved back shortly after being relieved of his duties in Sudbury. During the spring and summer of 1921, much of the organizing at the Lakehead had been performed by traveling organizers who spent one or two days in the twin cities and visited select lumber camps before returning south or moving on to larger centres in Manitoba and Saskatchewan.⁵² With Bryan now in the region more or less permanently, it was hoped much more substantial gains would be made.

It remains unclear when the WPC officially established a branch at the Lakehead. Arnold Beck, a leading member of the Finnish Building Company (the entity that controlled the Finnish Labour Temple in Port Arthur), recalled in the late 1970s that the party's first regional committee was multi-ethnic in composition. Beck himself claims to have been the first regional secretary. Einar Nordstrom describes the committee as having been comprised of Anglo-Saxon workers Doug Boom, Angus McLeod, and Finley McLeod; Finns Beck and Arne Skarra; a Ukrainian named Boiko; and a number of unnamed Italians.⁵³ Bryan, no doubt, was also a member, as he appears to have played a lead role in speaking out against both the OBU and the IWW.

Considering his position as former head of the OBU-dominated Central Labour Council and a well-known, if not always well-liked, member of the working class at the Lakehead, Bryan's conversion was a coup for the WPC in the area. His speeches provide an indication of what attracted regional workers to the CPC. Typically, they attacked syndicalism and the IWW's refusal to become politically active. The demands of workers, he often argued, could not be realized solely through concessions wrung from employers. Political participation was necessary for lasting changes in Canadian society. One of his favourite means to get the central issue across was a simple example, traceable to his early involvement with Daniel De Leon, which he shared with hundreds throughout Northwestern Ontario. Bryan told the story of a man going down a street with his hands behind his back. On his walk, the man meets a police officer who, because the man is a labourer, wants to club him or arrest him. The man would have no chance in the same way that the working class would have no chance if it relied only on its industrial arm and neglected its political arm.⁵⁴ Yet, there were also setbacks. Organizers did not stay put. Harry Bryan's candidacy in the provincial election – the first openly Communist candidate to run in the area

– netted only 200 votes (the moderate railway-union-backed candidate polled over 1,600).⁵⁵

As was the case at the turn of the century, Bryan remained committed to rural workers. Much as he had for the SDPC and OBU, he spent a large amount of his time touring the surrounding countryside speaking to outlying branches in order to solidify support for the CPC and to attract new members. It was here that Bryan would play a key role in the lumber strikes that spread throughout the region in October 1926.⁵⁶ When the strikes finally ended eight weeks later, over 30 companies and 3,000 men across the rural regions of Northwestern Ontario had become embroiled in the conflict.⁵⁷ In the Thunder Bay District, roughly 2,500 workers were involved, with protests occurring both in the twin cities and in the camps.⁵⁸

Despite earlier difficulties, when members of the eastern section of the Communist lumber workers union, the Lumber Workers' Industrial Union of Canada, met in Port Arthur in early March 1927, it boasted 1,500 members with branches throughout Northern Ontario. Members from the Lakehead dominated the executive with Alf Hautamäki as secretary and Harry Bryan as president.⁵⁹ While Bryan had been active during its first few years, he had not taken a direct role aside from the 1926 strike. However, as in the rest of the country, good organizers, especially English-speaking ones, remained difficult to find at the Lakehead. This increasingly became problematic as the CPC almost obsessively began focusing on increasing the total number of English-speaking members. The apathy towards the CPC on the part of the majority of Anglo labour leaders in the region and their tendency to favour traditional trade unionism and British-style labour politics contributed to the party reaching into the past to find a populist type of organizer who had preexisting ties with the community. To that end, in April CPC member Beckie Buhay wrote in a personal capacity to Bryan wondering if he would be willing to become more active.

A longtime friend of Buhay, he had recently hosted her at his home, where she had taken the opportunity to see if he was willing to become the literary agent for the district. Buhay soon after encouraged Bryan to be more involved, admitting that the leaders of the CPC “were very anxious” to have him do the work. Buhay also attempted to appeal to Bryan’s wallet by suggesting he would be able to “make it go financially as well.” In the end, he agreed; however, his instructions from the leadership went beyond merely assisting with organizational efforts in the region. The party had also charged him with keeping an eye on the lumber workers and, in particular, on Hautamäki.⁶⁰

Bryan would figure prominently in the Port Arthur and Fort William celebrations of the Paris Commune and the anniversary of the CPC. On a number of occasions, the Workers' Hall in Port Arthur and the Robertson Street Finnish Hall in Fort William were filled to capacity to hear him speak of the party’s past struggles and of the difficulties it currently faced.⁶¹ Bryan also involved himself in the early co-operative moment started by Finnish farmers in the rural areas surrounding the Lakehead in 1927.⁶² Bryan’s

efforts and an increase in CPC propaganda in the region led to a resurgence of the party. In particular, this was apparent in the renewal of a branch of the Womens' Labour League in Port Arthur.

As his efforts before the First World War reveal, Bryan had previously been successful in bridging the ethnic divides between worker organizations at the Lakehead. In addition, it was well known that his role in CPC inner turmoil in the region had to do with ideological rather than ethnic differences. Bryan, along with most of the local leadership, opposed the ascendancy of Tim Buck to the leadership of the CPC in 1929 due to his and the party's policy of abolishing language federations and, in particular, anti-Finnish sentiments. Although unknown if this directly influenced his increasing lack of participation throughout the 1930s, clearly tensions existed. While they, along with the rest of the District Executive Committee, put aside their differences, joined with the local Finnish section, and supported the party's decision, others soon took lead roles in the region.⁶³

Throughout the rest of his life, Harry Bryan continued the struggle for working class rights with the tremendous dedication that he had demonstrated since his first foray into the organizational field with the Knights of Labour. He also continued to travel throughout Ontario, working for the cause, but more frequently coming home to Dorion and Hurkett, where some of his children, now grown up with families of their own, lived. He died in 1947 and was buried beside his wife in the Stanley Cemetery, west of Thunder Bay. Harry Bryan was a remarkable man. He dedicated his life to the betterment of those of his fellow men through unionization and was active during a very turbulent period in labour's history, when governments and employers used every instrument at their disposal to smash the union movement. Never once, despite being blacklisted several times and forced to move on with his family, did he waver from his chosen course. A friend, confidant and associate of some of the labour giants of his time, like Samuel Gompers and Eugene Debs, he was equally at home on the picket line or in the union hall. He was single-minded to an extent most people could not sustain and it appeared to cost him dearly in terms of his relationships with other people; he was a man of fanatical conviction.

NOTES

¹ For brief overviews of Harry Bryan, see Lakehead University Archives (hereafter LUA), Jean Morrison Labour History Collection (hereafter JMLHC), General Series 186a, Tape 5, Harry Bryan Reminiscences, 1972; and Jean Morrison, "Community and Conflict: A Study of the Working Class and Its Relationships at the Canadian Lakehead, 1903-1913" (MA thesis, Lakehead University, 1974).

² Confederation College, Labour History Interview Project, Einar Nordstrom and others, "Reminiscences on Harry Bryan". Jean Morrison vigorously disputes the number of unions Nordstrom claims Bryan organized.

³ For more on the Knights of Labor, see Gregory S. Kealey and Bryan Palmer, *Dreaming of What Might Be: The Knights of Labor in Ontario, 1880-1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

⁴ Morrison, "Community in Conflict," 28.

⁵ For more on Bryan's relationship with Gompers, see Morrison, "Community in Conflict," 28. Her sources are the *Gompers Letterbooks* held at the Library of Congress. For more on Gompers in Canada, see Robert H. Babcock's *Gompers in Canada: a study in American continentalism before the First World War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974) and his much more useful PhD dissertation "The A.F.L. in Canada, 1896-1908: A Study in American Labor Imperialism" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1970). It was in Cleveland while working for the AFL that Bryan organized and later became the president of the Street Railwaymen's Union and a regional organizer for the federation. One of Bryan's most memorable moments while in Cleveland was meeting Booker T. Washington. Washington spoke at a convention Bryan organized between local union leaders, employers, and city officials. After his speech and the photographs taken, carriages took all the officials and some union men from the hall. All, that is, except Washington who was denied entry. Bryan and the other organizers went over and apologized to Washington for his treatment. Washington told Bryan that he was used to it and he was not angry, he only pitied them. Bryan, Nordstrom recalled, responded, "that workers have the same problems as coloured people of the United States, but we are more numerous and can make ourselves heard as we do not have to contend with race prejudice." See LUA, JMLHC, Tape 5, Harry Bryan Reminiscences, 1972.

⁶ See Bruce Muirhead, "The Evolution of the Lakehead's Commercial and Transport Infrastructure," in *Thunder Bay: From Rivalry to Unity*, ed. Thorold J. Tronrud and A. Ernest Epp (Thunder Bay: Thunder Bay Historical Museum, 1995), 76-97.

⁷ Fort William *Daily Times-Journal* (hereafter *FWD TJ*), 20 January 1903.

⁸ Morrison, "The Organization of Labour at Thunder Bay," in *Thunder Bay: From Rivalry to Unity*, 121 and *FWD TJ*, 12 October 1903.

⁹ As Jean Morrison has suggested, "along with considerable oratorical and organizational skills, Bryan brought with him the Debsian brand of

socialism, a non-dogmatic blend of Marxism, populism and Christian socialism.” See Morrison, “Community and Conflict,” 29.

¹⁰ LUA, JMLHC, Tape 5, Harry Bryan Reminiscences, 1972.

¹¹ For more on the street-railway system, see F.B. Scollie, “The Creation of the Port Arthur Street Railway 1890-95. Canada’s First Municipally-owned Street Railway,” *Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society Papers and Records* 18 (1990): 40-58 and Mark Chochla, “Sabbatarians and Sunday Street Cars,” *Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society Papers and Records* 17 (1989): 25-36. While Port Arthur and Fort William in the 1890s had established a municipally owned street-railway system, the municipal election of 1902 enshrined the idea of the benefits of municipal ownership within the local psyche.

¹² A.W. Rasporich and Thorold J. Tronrud, “Class, Ethnicity and Urban Competition,” in *Thunder Bay, From Rivalry to Unity*, 211 and, for a thorough discussion, Thorold J. Tronrud, *Guardians of Progress: Boosters & Boosterism in Thunder Bay, 1870-1914* (Thunder Bay: Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society, 1993).

¹³ Steven C. High, “‘A Municipal Ownership Town’: The Organization and Regulation of Urban Services in Port Arthur, 1875-1914,” (MA thesis, Lakehead University, 1994), 4. High’s sources are the *Sessional Papers*, Ontario Bureau of Labour, 1911. An additional source on municipal ownership of electricity at the Lakehead can be found in David Leo Black and Steven C. High, “Power for the People: Inter-Urban Rivalry over Electricity at the Lakehead, 1884-1917” (Lakehead University Centre for Northern Studies Research Report # 39, 1995). For period discussions of the concept of municipal ownership, see A.H. Sinclair, “Municipal Monopolies and Their Management (1891),” in *Saving the Canadian City. The First Phase 1880-1920: An Anthology of Early Articles on Urban Reform*, ed. Paul Rutherford (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 5-44 and James Mavor, “Municipal Ownership of Public Utilities (1904),” 45-52.

¹⁴ Martin Robin, *Radical Politics and Canadian Labour*, (Kingston: Queen’s University Industrial Relations Centre, 1968), 34.

¹⁵ Samuel Gompers, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor*, Vol. I, (New York: Augustus M. Kelley Publishers, 1967), 397.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 403.

¹⁷ *FWD TJ*, 20 January 1903, 3.

¹⁸ Ibid., 27 February 1903, 2.

¹⁹ For an examination of the life and career of Peltier, see Frederick Brent Scollie, "Louis Lawrence Peltier (1853-1939): Railway Labour Leader, Mayor of Fort William 1909-10," *Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society Papers and Records* 32 (2004): 10-30.

²⁰ Jean Morrison, "Labour in Fort William and Port Arthur, 1903-1913" *Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society Papers and Records* 1 (1973): 23.

²¹ Morrison, 55.

²² *FWD TJ*, 11 and 14 January 1904.

²³ "Reminiscences on Harry Bryan."

²⁴ Taped interview with Ethel (Bryan) Fehr, 6 November 1969.

²⁵ Morrison, 56.

²⁶ *Cotton's Weekly*, 4 May 1911. Bryan represented his new home town of Kakabeka Falls (located 37 km from Fort William), while George Mekela represented Port Arthur and C. Kukkel Fort William. Other delegates were also reported from Nipigon, Fort Frances, and Kenora.

²⁷ *Cotton's Weekly*, 25 June 1914.

²⁸ *Cotton's Weekly*, 23 June 1914. According to *Cotton's Weekly*, the total provincial SDPC vote was 6,326. See 6 August 1914.

²⁹ Port Arthur *Daily News-Chronicle* (hereafter *PADNC*), 29 April 1916.

³⁰ Library and Archives of Canada (hereafter LAC), Department of Labour (hereafter DL), vol. 305, Strike 62.

³¹ *FWD TJ*, 2 May 1916.

³² The elevators only managed to remain in operation because of the managers and those workers paid by the month rather than hourly. As Frederick Urry reported to the Department of Labour: "casual day workers did not go on strike; however, this class of labours most serious problems, and will have to be dealt with sooner or later." See LAC, DL, vol. 305, Strike 62. Workers at the CNR elevator, the largest in the world, however,

remained on the job despite rumours that they too would join the strike on the second day.

³³ *Winnipeg Telegram*, 1 May 1916.

³⁴ *PADNC*, 1 May 1916. The spread of the strike also received coverage in the *Winnipeg Telegram* the same day.

³⁵ Frederick Urry's reports on the Truckers' participation can be found in LAC, Department of Labour Collection (hereafter DL), RG27, vol. 305, Strike 50. Urry estimated the dispute only involved between 90-100 men, but the number cited in local newspapers accounted for both monthly and hourly wage earners. The situation at the Government Elevator in Port Arthur was slightly different. Workers had attempted to negotiate with management following the onset of the Elevator D strike, only to be rebuffed by the general manager, C.E. Allen.

³⁶ *PADNC*, 3 May 1916.

³⁷ *PADNC*, 4 May 1916 and LAC, DL, vol. 305, Strike 62.

³⁸ LAC, DL, vol. 305, strike 62. Those lucky enough to retain their job were back to work the next day. In the case of the truckers, they capitulated just as the majority of the 140 imported workers from Winnipeg refused to work. See *PADNC*, 5 May 1916.

³⁹ *PADNC*, 5 January 1917.

⁴⁰ *PADNC*, 4 June 1917.

⁴¹ LUA, Thunder Bay Finnish Canadian Historical Society (hereafter TBFCHS), MG8, Series b, 7, 10, Item 2, Tape 2, Interview with William Holder, 31 March 1977.

⁴² LUA, Canadian Teollisuusunionistinen Kannatus Liito fonds (hereafter CTKL), MG10, Series D, 8, 10, "A.T. Hill Biography," nd., p. 12.

⁴³ *FWD TJ* and *PANC*, 29 May 1919.

⁴⁴ Robin, *Soldiers of the International*, 192.

⁴⁵ Disagreements at the February convention of lumber workers in the Port Arthur district, for example, had led to a referendum on the issue and a break from the Vancouver headquarters in March. See Ian Radforth, *Bushworkers*

and Bosses: Logging in Northern Ontario, 1900-1980 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 118. The Winnipeg Central Labour Council, for example, discussed the issue of industrial versus geographic organization and the issue of the lumber workers' fee in earnest in August. See PAM, RBR, #15, "Special Meeting of Central Labour Council," 31 August 1920.

⁴⁶ *Le Travailleur/The Worker* (Montreal), 15 December 1920.

⁴⁷ Many of the OBU's leadership, including R.B. Russell attended the founding convention of the Communist Party of Canada even if they eventually did not support the new organization. See Warrian, "The Challenge of the One Big Union Movement in Canada, 1919-1921," 103-104.

⁴⁸ Logan, *Trade Unions in Canada*, 328. For information on the OBU's role in the Freight Handlers' Strike in 1922, see *OBUB*, 24 August; 31 August; 7 September 1922; and *PANC* and *FWDTJ*, 22 August to 8 September 1922.

⁴⁹ Radforth, *Bushworkers and Bosses*, 120.

⁵⁰ The relatively little organization occurring in Ontario is evident in correspondence between Tim Buck and head of the LWIUC, J.M. Clarke in April 1923. See Radforth, *Bushworkers and Bosses*, 120; A.T. Hill, "Basic Highlights of Labour History" (1973) and "Highlights of Labour History, Lakehead, Canada, and the World" (1973); and Douglas Thur, "Beat Around the Bush: The Lumber and Sawmill Workers Union and the New Political Economy of Labour in Northern Ontario, 1936-1988" (MA Thesis, Lakehead University, 1990), 39.

⁵¹ Organized in both the United States and Canada in 1921, the TUEL was created to spearhead the action among the trade unions in the hopes of compelling the American Federation of Labor to pursue policies of a more militant nature. See Tom Ewen, *The Forge Glows Red: From Blacksmith to Revolutionary* (Toronto: Progress Books, 1974), 138-141.

⁵² LAC, Communist International fonds, (hereafter CI), Reel 3 [K-271], 495, 98, 4, p. 22, Minutes of CEC Meeting, 5 August 1921. Interestingly, the organizer was moved from Fort William after the CEC notified him that it actually was not in his territory. For more on the Communist Party of Canada reports to the Comintern about the OBU during this period, see Reel 3 [K-271], 495, 98, 6, p. 12, William Moriarty, Report on Canada, August 1922.

⁵³ LUA, TBFCHS, B, 7, 1, 13, p. 2.

⁵⁴ LUA, JMLHC, General Series 186a, Tape 5, Harry Bryan Reminiscences, 1972.

⁵⁵ *The Worker*, 20 June 1923.

⁵⁶ *FWD TJ*, 6 October 1926. Interestingly, the strikers, according to Bryan, were not asking for the recognition of their unions. Hautamäki and James Dixon, general secretary of the Trades and Labour Council of the Thunder Bay District, made it very clear that the strike had nothing to do with the One Big Union. See *PADNC*, 17 September 1926.

⁵⁷ LAC, DL, RG27, vol. 337, Strike 76, Alf Hautamäki to Department of Labour, 29 November 1926. The initial numbers reported were 1300 men and 15 women. For coverage of the strike, see *The Worker*, 2, 16, 23, and 30 October 1926 and *Industrial Solidarity* 6 October 1926. See also *The Blackfly* (March 1974), pp. 6-7; and Avery, 'Dangerous Foreigners': *European Immigrant Workers and Labour Radicalism in Canada, 1896-1932* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1979), 124.

⁵⁸ *FWD TJ*, 6 October 1926.

⁵⁹ *The Worker*, 26 March 1927 and LAC, Department of Immigration (hereafter DI), RG76, Volume 219, File 95027, List of Fort William Finnish Members c. 1927-1928. This item also contains lists for Fort Frances, Port Arthur, South Porcupine, Timmins, Porcupine, Nipigon, and Port Arthur. In Northern Ontario, branches could be found in Port Arthur, Nipigon, Sault St. Marie, Beaver Lake, Wanup, Cobalt, Rosegrove, Kirkland Lake, Connaught Station, Pottsville, South Porcupine, and Timmins.

⁶⁰ LAC, Communist Party of Canada fonds (hereafter CPC), Reel M-7378, 5B 0458, Beckie Buhay to Harry Bryan, 19 April and *The Worker*, 16 April 1927.

⁶¹ *The Worker*, 16 April 1927.

⁶² LUA, JMLHC, Tape 5, Harry Bryan Reminiscences, 1972.

⁶³ LAC, CPC, Reel M-7380, 8C 0257-0268, "Report of the Sixth Convention of the Communist Party of Canada," 31 May to 7 June 1929, 1-2 and 137-138 and Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks* (2004), 222-223. For the District support of the decision, see *The Worker*, 16 November 1929 and *Canada's Party of Socialism: History of the Communist Party of Canada, 1921-1976* (Toronto: Progress Books, 1982), 59.