

Workers versus Austerity: Lessons from Canada's 'Days of Action', 1995-1998

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Abstract

The Great Recession has left in its wake an expected “age of austerity” where the deficits accumulated to stave off economic collapse are being addressed through steep cuts to government spending, with profound implications for social services and public sector employment. This scenario is playing out across the Global North – from the U.K. to the U.S. to Canada to Greece to France. This paper will examine an earlier era in one of these countries – Canada – where in quite similar circumstances (recession, deficit-spending and austerity) there was a concerted effort by unions and social movements to mount a campaign of resistance. From December 1995, through all of 1996 and 1997, until coming to an end in 1998 – a series of mass strikes and enormous demonstrations swept through the major cities of Ontario, Canada’s biggest province and the heart of its manufacturing sector. Among many other issues, this “Days of Action” campaign highlighted the difficult and important relationship between “traditional” and “non-traditional” sections of the working class. It also was characterized, within the existing workers’ organizations, by periodic clashes between the energetic inexperience of newly-active union members, and the institutional experience of the movement embodied in a quite developed full-time layer of union officials. This paper is part of a larger research project, “Self-Emancipation: Reflections on Work, Organization and Resistance.”

Introduction

From December 11 1995, through all of 1996 and 1997, until coming to an end in the fall of 1998, eleven one-day general strikes and “days of action” were mounted in major cities throughout Ontario – Canada’s biggest province (the equivalent of a U.S. state) and heart of its manufacturing sector. In the second decade of the 21st century, there are both analytic and anecdotal reasons for examining this Days of Action experience.

Analytically, three things at least stand out as distinct parallels between Ontario’s experience in the mid 1990s, the experience of much of the advanced industrial economies today, and in particular the current experience in Great Britain. First, a major recession punished the Ontario economy in the early 1990s, eliminating thousands of manufacturing jobs. Second, in Ontario, it was a social-democratic government which dealt with the effects of this recession. The Ontario New Democratic Party (NDP) administration of Bob Rae (the NDP is the Canadian equivalent of Britain’s Labour Party), rang up considerable deficits while in office from 1990 to 1995, as part of fairly typical “counter-cyclical” policies appropriate to moments of recession. Third, this social-democratic government was replaced by the Conservatives under Mike Harris in 1995, which then set about to deal with the debt-burden (in part accumulated because of those counter-cyclical policies), through an extreme austerity program (euphemistically called the “Common Sense Revolution”). The parallels, here, are in fact quite striking to the current moment in British economics and politics.

It was indicated, above, that the debt-burden in public finance in Ontario, inherited by the Conservatives in 1995, was “in part” the result of the counter-cyclical spending engaged in by their social-democratic predecessors. The phrase “in part” obscures quite a bit. Just as significant in structuring the fiscal background to the Conservatives’ Common Sense Revolution, were a series of decisions made by the senior government in Canada, the federal government based in Ottawa, presided over during the entire Common Sense Revolution period by a Liberal Party majority government headed by Jean Chrétien.

The Liberals took office federally in November 1993, reducing the federal Conservatives under Kim Campbell to just two seats. The federal Conservatives suffered from the same anger which would punish the NDP in Ontario – the justifiable anger of an electorate suffering under the early 1990’s recession which pushed unemployment into double digits. The recession had sent budget deficits to record levels – \$40 billion for the federal government, more than \$60 billion if the provincial government deficits were added in. (Department of Finance Canada, 2008) The Liberals announced that this had to end, and they ruthlessly set about to do so.

The people most identified with this massive restructuring were Prime Minister Jean Chrétien and his finance minister Paul Martin. It is important to realize, however, that these policies were not personal. They were deeply embedded in the bureaucratic institutions which comprise the modern state apparatus, and were also reflective of class

priorities shared across countries. Two other representatives of this institutional and class consensus were Jocelyne Bourgon and Marcel Massé. Their relative lack of visibility does not make them any less significant, as we shall see below. Martin – working with Bourgon and Massé among others – began a process of cutbacks that devastated health education and social assistance across the country. In a very short time, federal government spending had been slashed by 20 per cent. Close to 50,000 public sector workers, employed by Ottawa, were let go. (Oliver, 2009) (White, 2009).

That was just the tip of the iceberg. One of the principle mechanisms used by the Liberals to slash spending was to change the rules by which tax money was shipped out to the provinces. The effect was to reduce by billions of dollars the amount of money given to the provinces – and this was critical, because it is the provinces in Canada which fund health care, education and social assistance. These central components of the “welfare state,” while delivered provincially, are extremely dependent on “transfer payments” from the senior level of government.

It is in reference to the Liberals, that the anecdotal becomes relevant. In the summer of 2009, the two previously mentioned figures from that era’s Liberal administration – former top bureaucrat Jocelyne Bourgon and former cabinet minister Marcel Massé – flew across the Atlantic and met with leading British Conservatives including Philip Hammond, the shadow chief secretary to the Treasury. (Oliver, 2009) We are not privy to the discussions which took place at these meetings. But it might not be a coincidence that the Conservatives in Britain, now in office, have embarked upon a serious austerity offensive that has many similarities with Canada’s experience in the 1990s.

With the entry of the Liberal Party into this story, the attempt to make analogies with the British experience begins to break down, as the Liberals have no close parallel in the party structure of the United Kingdom, being quite dissimilar to the party in Britain which shares part of their name, the Liberal-Democrats. If you think of the Liberal Party of Canada as roughly similar to the Democratic Party of the United States, minus its Dixiecrat wing, you won’t be far wrong. However, given the fact that the background to the austerity measures in Ontario in the 1990s was in part shaped by the policies of the Liberals federally and the Conservatives provincially, in that sense the parallels are quite strong, given the fact that in the current context in Britain, it is a coalition between the Conservatives and the Liberal-Democrats which is presiding over an austerity program. This point is worth emphasizing, as it is often under-appreciated in Canada the extent to which the Liberal cuts nationally were a crucial factor in creating the environment which encouraged the very right-wing austerity measures from the Ontario Conservatives provincially.

Mike Harris, when he became Conservative premier of Ontario in 1995, was only too happy to see money from Ottawa drying up. He was a real Thatcherite – and was eager to cut as deeply as he could. He wasted little time.

- Social assistance was cut by over 20 per cent with one blow – suddenly, Canada’s largest city, Toronto, was a place where visible panhandling became the order of the day and where food bank use soared;
- Education budgets were slashed, leading to crowded classrooms and fewer education assistants – high school students eventually saw one year of schooling eliminated entirely, ultimately replaced, for many students, by an additional, very expensive, year of university;
- Health care budgets were slashed, leading to horror stories of crowded emergency rooms, lack of beds, and patients stashed in hospital corridors;
- All of this took place in an atmosphere of racism and scapegoating, culminating in the 1997 shooting death, by police, of young First Nations’ activist, Dudley George. (For an overview of the period, see MacDermid and Albo 2001)

This paper will focus on the origins of the movement against this austerity program – and it is one that can’t simply be told through an examination of the official institutions of the labour movement. In the first months of the Harris government, there was little response from the leaders of that movement. Just as Britain’s labour movement is closely tied to the Labour Party, Ontario’s labour movement is, and was, closely tied to the NDP, and it was in the final years of the NDP government in Ontario, that the austerity program had begun (although in a milder fashion than was to be the case under the Conservatives). Having said little during the NDP-led tightening of social assistance, cuts to education and cuts to health care, union leaders in the first months of the Harris government were frozen, uncertain how to respond.

But a response did come, and to understand that response, the analysis has to depart from the plane of institutions, and engage in the much more complex work of assessing social movement activism. A series of small community coalitions sprang up, hounding the Conservatives at every turn. September 27, 1995 – the opening day of the fall session – between 5,000 and 10,000 marched on Queen’s Park, in a demonstration organized by the Labour Council of Metro Toronto and York Region and the Embarrass Harris Campaign. The crowd included 17 busloads of protesters from Ottawa, Peterborough, Sudbury and St. Catharines and members of the Canadian Autoworkers, United Food and Commercial Workers, United Steelworkers of America, Canadian Union of Postal Workers, Canadian Union of Public Employees and the Ontario Public Service Employees Union – as well as hundreds marching with the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP). (Monsrebraaten, 1995) (PolEconJournal II, 1995, October 30, October)

The environment of resistance was reflected a few weeks later, when the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) met in session. The 2,000 delegates – much closer to the anger of the rank and file than the cautious and demoralized central union leadership – voted to launch a series of one-day, one-city general strikes to oppose the Liberal/Conservative cuts, general strikes which came to be known as “Days of Action (Rusk, 1995) (PolEconJournal II, 1995, December 4)

These “Days of Action” were unprecedented. The first, in December 1995, shut down the industrial city of London, Ontario in the middle of winter. Workers by the thousands illegally walked off the job, some of them carrying signs “London, Paris,” inspired by the great wave of strikes breaking out in France that year. The February, 1996 strike in Hamilton Ontario saw a massive crowd of 100,000 take to the streets. Without a doubt, the high point was the magnificent Toronto strike. October 25, 1996. That day, one million people stayed away from work. The next day, 350,000 marched past the frightened Tories, separated from the massive crowd by hundreds of police outside the city’s convention centre. (PolEconJournal II, 1996, January 8, March 4, October 30) It will take a much bigger research project to capture all of these events. This paper will focus solely on the origins of the Days of Action, and its first key events, and take the story just past the first big watershed, the Hamilton Days of Action in February of 1996, and the massive Ontario public workers strike which immediately followed. It will then sketch out, from this story, a few key analytic points which these events suggest, and which the wider research project will pursue in more detail.

January 25, 1995 – The dress rehearsal

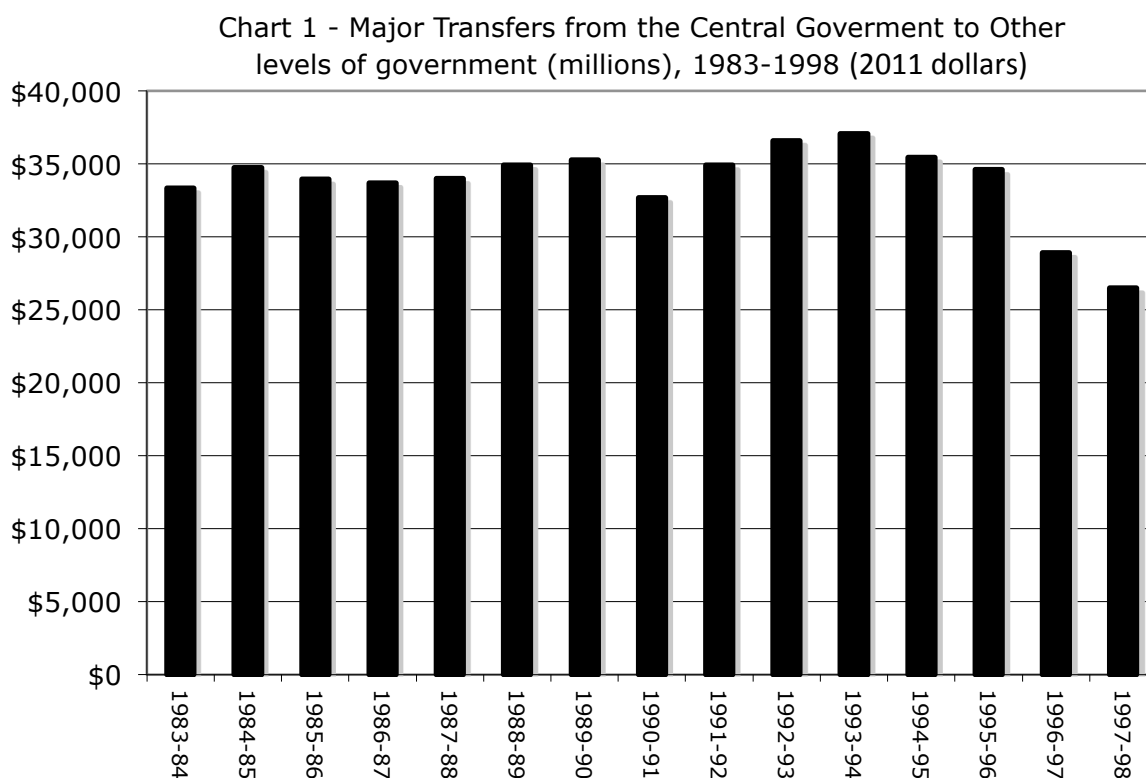
January, 1995, the threads which were to combine to create the days of action movement, were visible if you looked for them. Politically, there was real confusion. In Ontario, a New Democratic Party (NDP) government had been the governing party for almost five years. Greeted at first with euphoria, it was now isolated and increasingly desperate. Its policies had alienated the NDP from the very people who had put the party in office – organized labour, students and the poor.

Their hiring of welfare police to crack down on “welfare fraud” was a straightforward mimicking of the scapegoating policies of the right-wing. The NDP government eliminated student grants for university and college students, presided over a significant increase in tuition fees, and laid the groundwork for Ontario post-secondary students becoming some of the most indebted in North America. And most centrally, their attack on public sector wages – euphemistically called a “Social Contract” – had split the labour movement, and turned thousands of once enthusiastic NDP supporters into indifferent bystanders. Waiting in the wings were the parties of big business – the Liberals and the Conservatives – preparing to take advantage of the disillusion at the base of the NDP, to ride into office.

But politics is not just a story of the official parties. Deep forces were at work, pulling people from passivity and into mass action. The first sign of this was not in the workers' movement, but in the student movement.

January 25, 1995 had been called as a day of action by the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS). This was not unusual. CFS had frequently called demonstrations against government education policies. But this time, the issue was more serious than usual. The federal Liberals were proposing cuts to university and college funding which, if

implemented, would see tuition fees double in just three years. These cuts were part of an overhaul of federal financing, unprecedented in its scope. To deal with debts accumulated during years of Tory rule, the federal liberals had redefined the way in which transfer payments were to be delivered to the provinces, the net effect of which would be to reduce those payments by billions. Chart 1 (Department of Finance Canada, 2010) captures this starkly. From 1983-84 until 1995-96, transfer payments stagnated at around the \$35 billion mark, in fact a long slow cut in per capita terms. But from 1995-96 until 1996-97, transfer payments plunged by \$7 billion, and then by another \$2 billion between 1996-97 and 1997-98. This is the picture of the austerity measures behind the construction of the neoliberal state, one aspect of which was the threatened doubling of tuition fees.



The response to the CFS call for a day of strike and action, was extraordinary. More than 60,000 participated in rallies and demonstrations across the country. If you include those who stayed away from classes, the figure of those involved rises to well above 100,000. And significantly, the mobilization had been done in conjunction with non-students – with social movement organizations, anti-poverty organizations and trade unions.

[M]ore than 140 local, provincial and national organizations endorsed the Day of Action ... Steelworkers Local 9196, miners in Stephenville, Newfoundland, called in their support and congratulated students for “kicking butt.” ... In some cities, Canadian Union of Public Employees

(CUPE) members took the initiative to approach student unions and offer concrete organizational support. In other cities, postal workers participated in events leading up to January 25th. And throughout Canada, Public Service Alliance offices, CUPE offices and labour councils opened up their offices to provide students with access to photocopying. In Regina, 100 people defied temperatures of 22 degrees below zero and arrived on campus at 7:30 am to completely shut down the campus. The picket line was comprised of students, faculty and CUPE support staff who were not working that day. Cafeteria workers used their breaks to bring coffee to those staffing the picket lines. In Windsor, 250 Autoworker union members participated in the 2,000 strong rally. (PolEconJournal II, 1995, February 5)

The different sectors of society do not exist in isolation. Student struggles affect workers, and workers' struggles affect students. The trade union movement across Canada was, at that moment, extremely passive. Strike levels were at a low point not seen since the early years of the depression in the 1930s (see Chart 2). In Ontario, this passivity was compounded by the demoralization felt after the NDP failed to meet the expectations of those who brought it to office, all this in a context of chronically high unemployment and a government cutback offensive, as governments at all levels set about the process of reducing the deficit by savaging social programs.

But the January 25 student mobilization had a real impact on a layer of trade union militants.

A Steelworker who marched with the students on January 25th, said that when he saw 5,000 demonstrators from the University of Toronto round the corner to join the rally, a charge went through his body. "It was like a shot of adrenaline! I haven't felt that way for years, not since the Radio Shack strike, when busloads of miners came down from Sudbury and scattered the cops and the scabs. You can feel the power that we have." (Egan, 1995, March 8)

January 25 was an anticipation, a dress rehearsal if you will. Students had responded in numbers far bigger than any had predicted. The militancy of these young people – many demonstrating for the first time in their lives – caught labour activists unaware. It awoke memories in veterans of mass struggles in the past, and began the process of spreading the idea that mass action was possible against the government cutback offensive.

For the moment, it remained an anticipation. The story in Ontario shifted to the election. To no one's surprise the NDP lost. To everyone's surprise, it was the Conservatives and not the Liberals who took office. Led by former golf semi-pro Mike Harris, these Conservatives were committed to an agenda of cutbacks on a scale never before seen in the province.

The Tories go on the offensive

The scale of the Tories' offensive against the poor, against social services, and against workers' rights was unprecedented. June 27, one day after being inaugurated, the Harris government announced a 30-day review of all public housing projects. (Canadian Press, 1995) Al Leach, the minister chosen by Harris to be responsible for housing, made no secret of his agenda. "As we've stated all along, it's our desire to get out of the housing business," he would tell reporters, later in July. (Girard & White, 1995) (Small, 1995) Three weeks into power, the axe really fell.

- Social assistance for Ontario's poorest residents was slashed 21.6 per cent, a cut of \$938 million per year.
- New non-profit child-care spaces were cancelled, a \$13 million per year cut.
- The JobsOntario training program was shut, an \$86 million cut.
- Toronto's Eglinton subway and other rapid transit programs were shelved (even though \$54 million had been spent digging the Eglinton tunnel, and another \$42 million had to be spent filling in the hole (Small, 1995)), a cut of \$200 million.
- The planned Jumpstart youth employment program was killed before it started, a cut of \$60 million.
- \$8 million was cut from the Employment Equity Commission, \$10 million from the Advocacy Commission and \$16 million from the Workplace Innovation and Demonstration project.
- The Royal Commission on the Workers Compensation Board was scrapped.
- Pay equity funding was capped at \$500 million annually.
- Payments to all social service agencies were cut 2.5 per cent effective October 1 to be followed by a 5 per cent cut in 1996-1997.

The cuts, in all, totalled \$1.9 billion, more than half of this coming at the expense of social assistance recipients. (Walker, 1995) This was just the beginning. As the months unfolded, it became clear that the Conservatives were set on a complete re-ordering of life in Ontario. Some of the changes were ideological and not fiscal. In June of 1996, for instance, for the first time since the 1930s, the Conservatives introduced workfare into the province. Up to 300,000 social assistance recipients would be forced to work up to 17 hours a week. If they refused, they would be cut off social assistance. The implication, of course, was that the unemployed were out of work out of choice, not because of poor economic conditions. Jamie Kristensen of OCAP expressed a different view, June 12 1996, at the raucous news conference where Social Services Minister David Tsubouchi announced the new program. "I've been through upgradings," Kristensen told reporters. "I've gone through college. There is no work for me out there." (Mittelstaedt, 1996)

From the beginning, small battles

The election of the Harris government, the open war on the poor and the open war on workers was felt like a body blow by working people everywhere. But in spite of the shock and disorientation that was widespread throughout the province, there was from the beginning, a minority that was willing to take to the streets and protest. Harris rolled to his majority government June 8, 1995. The next night, 350 gathered in Toronto for a protest against the former NDP government's refusal to legislate same-sex benefits. The demo was transformed into a denunciation of the "Tory bigots" (probably the most popular of the signs carried by the protesters). (PolEconJournal II, 1995, June 14) June 26, the new Conservative government was sworn in. Two thousand five hundred angry protesters rallied outside Queen's Park. At times their angry chants could be heard inside the legislature. (PolEconJournal II, 1995, July 3) (Ibbitson, 1995, June 27) July 19, the day before Harris was to announce severe cuts to daycare subsidies and attacks on daycare workers' wages, 1,000 daycare workers went on an illegal strike in protest, demonstrating at Queen's Park. (PolEconJournal II, 1995, July 24) July 21, the Embarrass Harris coalition rallied several hundred people outside government offices in downtown Toronto to denounce the attacks on the poor and on social programs. (Monsrebraaten & Moloney, 1995) On July 29, 2,000 demonstrated against the 21.6 per cent cuts to welfare slated to be implemented October 1. "They were joined by 150 people who marched 15 miles from Scarborough, North York and Etobicoke." (PolEconJournal II, 1995, August 8) (See also picture in the *Toronto Star* which reported the demonstration as 500, not 2,000 (Toronto Star, 1995)) August 2, 300 demonstrated outside the provincial government building in Ottawa, also protesting the welfare cuts. "The demonstration shut down the intersection at Rideau Street and Sussex Drive." (Lachance, 1995) August 3, 150 demonstrators gathered outside the local Conservative MP's office in Peterborough. (PolEconJournal II, 1995, August 7) August 5, 75 members and supporters of "Harmony Hollow Home Co-operative" in Hamilton pitched tents and slept outside over night to protest cuts to 385 non-profit housing projects in Ontario. (Andrus, 1995) August 22, 600 people in a march organized by OCAP made their way from Regent Park in Toronto, "one of Toronto's poorest neighbourhoods, to Rosedale, home of some of Toronto's wealthiest business tycoons." (PolEconJournal II, 1995, September 9) (See also (Clarke, 2010))

These were just some of the actions across the province that summer. In places the actions involved just dozens. Often they involved hundreds. On at least three occasions they surpassed 1,000. But they proved to have an importance far in excess of their numbers as events unfolded in the fall and winter of that year one of the Harris reign.

The backlash against activism

So the summer of 1995 saw a rag-tag army of the poor, social activists, rank and file workers and socialists agitating against the Harris cuts and taking to the streets. But at the top of the movement, union leaders and respected figures on the left were either doing nothing or worse, openly criticizing those who were on the streets.

The June 26 demonstration against the Conservatives' swearing-in had been called by the Embarrass Harris coalition. For anyone with an historical memory, it was a remarkable event. The swearing-in of Bob Rae's NDP government, just five years earlier had been held in Convocation Hall. Rae and his new cabinet were met by 2,000 cheering trade unionists and social activists "many weeping unashamedly, too choked up to utter a word if our lives depended on it." (Caplan, 1990) Five years before that, when Liberal David Peterson was sworn into office, he held the ceremony "on the front steps of the Legislature at noon. The party had taken out newspaper ads inviting the public to attend the ceremony in an effort to show how open the new government intends to be." (Harrington & Christie, 1985) From a lawn-ceremony in 1985, to a love-in in 1990, to an angry protest of 2,500 in 1995 – for those who understand that the key to social progress is social activism, this was a significant shift. But this activism came under a sustained assault.

Leah Casselman, president of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union, "said before issuing ultimatums she would try to work with the government to improve services." (Van Alphen, 1995, June 10) She and Harry Hynd, Ontario director of the United Steelworkers of America, wanted "to meet with him [Harris] and give the Conservatives' 'Common Sense Revolution' some different common sense." (Van Alphen, 1995, June 21) She refused to back the June 26 anti-Tory demonstration. (Waugh, 1995) Sid Ryan, head of the Ontario wing of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) said, "to be going into an all-out war now with a government that clearly has a mandate, before they even take office, I think is the wrong strategy for labour." (Brennan, 1995) Sections of the left echoed these criticisms. Wayne Roberts in the 1970s edited a socialist newspaper. In the 1990s he was a regular writer for the leftish *Now* magazine in Toronto. He wrote in that publication an analysis of workfare, which said in part, "the left needs to do better than merely protesting the changes ... with the energy saved from kneejerk, activists can promote dialogue on how workfare ... can achieve pride of place in a full-employment economy." (Roberts, 1995) Even Naomi Klein, who a few years later would emerge as a leading figure in the anti-capitalist movement, was extremely dismissive towards at least one of the early attempts to challenge Harris. "Rallies don't always mean you're stuck in the '60s, but they have to be a culmination of something. Slogans in themselves ... you look like an idiot. That 'Embarrass Harris' stuff was stupid." (Hurst, 1995)

But it wasn't stupid. Within months there would be tens of thousands on the streets against the Conservatives, a movement with its roots in the very actions dismissed by established union leaders and established left-wingers. What would have happened if Harris had taken office and the small marches, the small rallies, the small protests not taken place? You don't create a mass movement out of nothing. Mass movements emerge when there is a growing feeling of confidence that action can make a difference. That confidence is not built all at once, but is a culmination of battles, which of necessity begin on a much smaller scale. The lesbian and gay rights activists, daycare workers,

anti-poverty activists, social assistance recipients, and “Embarrass Harris” organizers who took to the streets in the days and weeks following the Conservative victory helped nurture the flame of resistance during what were very difficult times.

The small battles during the summer of 1995 slowly began to build confidence that the Conservatives could be challenged. But for that challenge to become mass and effective, the ranks of organized labour would have to be brought on board. In Ontario, that means the 42 unions grouped in the OFL, with 650,000 members. This is by far and away the biggest mass organization in the province. Nowhere do ordinary people have mass organizations on the scale of trade unions. It is here that working people have their greatest strength. In Ontario, close to 40 per cent of working people were members of unions in the 1990s. If the anti-Tory movement could move from the streets to organized workers in the workplaces, then Harris would face a much bigger fight.

September and October 1995 – The dam bursts

The breakthrough came in August, 1995. The Embarrass Harris Campaign was joined by two major Toronto-based union organizations – the Labour Council of Metropolitan Toronto and the Building Trades Council – in the call for a mass protest outside Queen’s Park when the legislature reconvened September 27. For the first time, the rag-tag army of anti-Tory activists had been joined by organizations with links to the mass organizations of the working class.

On Labour Day in Toronto, more than 10,000 flyers announcing the demonstration were distributed to union contingents. “Hundreds of workers carried signs calling for unionists to join the protest” on September 27. OCAP organized a rally for the same day to culminate in a march from Allan Gardens to Queen’s Park. The Canadian Federation of Students built the action on campuses across the city. Buses from around the province were organized, including three from Guelph organized by the Guelph anti-cuts coalition and the Guelph and District Labour Council. “Solidarity actions are being planned for the same day in many communities throughout Ontario.” (PolEconJournal II, 1995, August 17) The anti-Tory street activists were now working in synch with student organizations and key labour organizations had come onside. The “big battalions” of the labour movement were not yet involved, but for the first time at least a section of the labour movement’s official organizations was backing the protests.

The result was beyond anyone’s expectations. Press reports put the demonstration at 5,000. Some organizers put the figure at 7,000. (Gadd, 1995) (Mittelstaedt, 1995) (Police beat back Ontario protesters, 1995) Many who were there put the figure at more than 10,000. No matter which figure is correct, it was the biggest protest yet against the Harris cuts, the first where the majority were organized workers, and the first which gave a sign of the mass movement which was building in the province.

Never before in Canadian history has the opening day of the legislature for a newly elected government been greeted by a demonstration as angry and large as the one that gathered on the 27th. The poor Tories even had to cancel the traditional horse-drawn carriage which drags onto the grounds the province's biggest scrounger, the lieutenant-governor, "representative of the Queen." There was no room on the lawn for this aristocratic dog and pony show – it was jammed with angry anti-Tory workers and students. (PolEconJournal II, 1995, October 4)

The protest was also the first one to penetrate into the workplaces. More than a demonstration, it involved workers collectively leaving their workplace, and marching to the legislature.

Workers streamed out of the hospitals on University Avenue, they came by the thousands out of government offices at Queen's Park, clerical and administrative workers crossed the road from the University of Toronto. The Labour Council of Metro Toronto bucked the trend so common today in other labour bodies. Because of the urging of rank and file delegates, at its last meeting it unanimously decided that it would organize with other sectors to make Harris and his Tories understand that they were in for a fight. The Labour Council called on trade unionists in the Toronto area to come out and stand up for their rights, and the rights of every oppressed and exploited person in this province. The result of this call put a lie to earlier pronouncements by union leaders who declared that demonstrations were premature and wouldn't work. (Egan, 1995, October 4)

The OFL had not backed the September 27 demonstration. But its success created enough pressure to finally push the top union leaders in the province to call an anti-Tory action. The OFL would be having its convention in November, and the call went out from the OFL Executive Board that during the convention there would be a mass anti-Tory demonstration November 22. From Embarrass Harris and OCAP to the Labour Council, the pressure had now built up sufficiently to put the ball in the court of the mass organizations of the Ontario working class. But it was not yet clear which way the OFL leadership would go. Often in the past there had been token action programs and token protests, sufficient to let off steam, but insufficient to build a real movement. Would this time around be any different?

Two things ensured that this time would be different: first, the deepening of confidence among rank and file workers that the Conservatives could be fought; second, the intensification of the Conservative assault.

Up to this point, the brunt of the Conservative assault had been on the poor and on social programs. But in the fall of 1995, the Conservatives turned their attention to labour. The previous NDP government had introduced anti-scab legislation, making strikebreaking

illegal in the province. This was an offence to the Conservatives and their big business backers. October 31, the Conservatives rushed through Bill 7 in order to repeal the provincial anti-scab law, a day before a planned protest by public-sector workers. At the same time, they adopted draconian labour legislation that would make it harder to unionize, easier to decertify unions, and pave the way to large-scale privatization of services.

Elizabeth Witmer, Minister of Labour, tried to portray the Conservative approach as “restoring the balance, a very delicate balance in labor relations, and adding a few measures that will democratize the workplace.” (Crone, 1995) But the real agenda was revealed by Dave Johnson, Chair of Management Board of Cabinet, who was quoted as saying that “civil servants must be stripped of their union rights for the economic good of Ontario.” (Brennan, 1995, October 14) If the first round of cuts had been a war on the poor, this new Bill 7 was a war on organized workers.

Suddenly, the union movement moved to the front of the line in the battle against the Harris Conservatives. The summer of street activism had given people confidence that the Conservatives could be fought. The September 27 breakthrough had shown that if major union organizations put out a serious call, thousands of workers would respond. The vicious attack on workers’ rights intersected with this rising confidence leading to an explosion of anger in the ranks of organized labour.

After the Labour Council of Toronto and York Region, the next major mass workers’ organization to respond was the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW). October 31, the day Bill 7 passed into law, “almost 600 leaders of the Canadian Auto Workers ... voted unanimously to lead a general strike before the end of the year.” (Waterloo Region Record, 1995) Suddenly, the top leaders of the Ontario union movement were caught between two opposing forces. From above, they were being hammered by the most vicious anti-union legislation in Ontario since the 1930s. From below, they were being pressed – first by the Toronto Labour Council’s 10,000 strong September 27 protest, and now by 600 local leaders of the province’s strongest private sector union – to call strike action against the attack.

Their response was to vacillate. The weekend before the bill was passed, Gord Wilson, president of the OFL, said that strike action was being planned against the bill. Wednesday, November 1 was floated as a possible date for a strike. But the day came and went and no strike call was issued. “There was talk in a lot of our Cambridge plants that people were upset they didn’t have it [the strike] today,” said Tom Rooke, president of local 1986 of the CAW in Cambridge. Friday November 3 was floated as a new strike day, but when the day arrived instead of a strike there was a meeting of top OFL union leaders. (Cannon, 1995) The truth is, there was considerable opposition at the top of the movement to taking strike action against the Conservatives. Many union leaders simply did not believe that workers would heed the call.

Then in the second week of November, word spread like wildfire through union and activist circles in Ontario – the CAW on November 14 was going to strike the massive Autoplex complex in Oshawa – the biggest centre of vehicle production in Canada. The walkout would have been illegal. There were then, and are to this day, severe restrictions on what strike activity is allowed between collective agreements. But there was such anger against the Conservatives that there was every reason to believe the walkout could have worked, and a successful walkout would have inspired the fightback across the province. This was particularly true for a job action involving the CAW, whose “social unionism” (or “movement unionism” in Sam Gindin’s words) meant it had a much greater affinity with the social movements – particularly the anti-poverty organizers – which had been at the forefront of the anti-Harris movement to date. (Gindin, 1995, pp. 254-282)

The leadership of the local, CAW 222, backed the call and threw themselves into organizing it. The Social Action Committee of the CAW was enthusiastically organizing to bring in activists from other trade unions and social movements. The strategy was to call on the day shift to stay away from work and reinforce this call with picket lines before the day shift at 6 am November 14, staffed by other trade unionists, anti-poverty activists and others opposed to the Conservatives. From Toronto to Kingston, plans were afoot for buses of activists to go to Oshawa to support the stay-away. For students, anti-poverty activists and trade unionists from the public sector to stand side by side on picket lines with one of the country’s strongest private sector unions would have seriously built the solidarity necessary in the fight against the Conservatives.

But after setting the wheels in motion for the stay-away, on November 9 the plug was pulled. The phones rang across the province to tell people the strike was off. CAW officials were not forthcoming with the reasons for calling off the November 14 stay-away. Apparently, there was fear at the highest levels that the rank and file of local 222, many of whom voted for the Conservatives in the provincial election and for the Reform Party (predecessor to the Canadian Alliance, now folded back into today’s federal Conservative Party) in the previous federal election, would not respond to the call for a stay-away.

But this was one more example of union leaders looking for a way to blame the rank and file for their own hesitancy. Reform Party arguments did have a hearing in a section of local 222. Right-wing Reform Party types led a call for the local to disaffiliate from the NDP. But those same individuals were trounced in the subsequent local elections.

The Reform Party based its politics on, amongst other things, welfare-bashing. But in October, the month before the announced strike date, anti-poverty activists from OCAP met with 200 stewards from local 222. At the meeting was a single mother on welfare who explained her plight to the stewards. There was an absolutely enthusiastic response from the stewards at the meeting. John Clarke, provincial organizer of OCAP put it clearly.

In the course of our work, we've had dealings with local leadership and with rank and file members of 222, and have always found that if the issues were presented from the standpoint of working class unity, we have got nothing but a warm reaction. (PolEconJournal II, 1995, December 5)

The general strike movement begins

The elation of November 9 gave way to dejection, then back to elation. There would be no Oshawa strike November 14. But the OFL Executive Board was recommending to the upcoming OFL convention that a one-day general strike take place in London on December 11.

This was a second-best choice. Striking Oshawa at the heart of the Canadian economy would have sent a quick message to the Conservatives that the movement was serious. It would have galvanized hundreds of thousands – in Ontario and in the other provinces – that a fight back was on the cards, a serious fight back. No one could question the power of the workers of Oshawa. That city, along with Winnipeg, Windsor, Sept-Îles and a few other places, is iconic in Canada as a location of historic working class militancy. London was more of an unknown quantity. There was some feeling that the OFL Executive Board was putting forward London in the hope that it would be rejected out of fear that London workers would not respond. Nonetheless, a date had been set, a place had been chosen, and all eyes turned to December 11 and London.

When the time came for the OFL convention to vote, there was no stopping the general strike call. The top leaders were preoccupied with the issue of labour's relation to the NDP and what some of us called, at the time, "an extraordinarily uninspiring executive election." There was little push from the top to build support for general strike action. But when the vote came on November 20, the 2,000 delegates, "much closer to the shop floor anger than the officials at the top of the movement, pushed these petty disputes aside to massively endorse the action plan" and its call for a one-day strike in London, December 11. (PolEconJournal II, 1995, December 5)

Suddenly, there was a road map for activists, showing the way to building a mass movement against the Conservatives. Shut down London December 11. Move to another major city in early 1996. Build towards a province-wide general strike to stop the Conservative attacks. A general strike had brought the Conservative government in Britain to its knees in the early 1970s. A general strike in Ontario would reveal the extent of the isolation of the Conservatives, and build the confidence of people who wanted a way out of the devastation the Conservatives were leaving in their wake. As the buses were booked to travel to London, as the leaflets and picket signs were being prepared, there was a sense throughout the province that everything was to play for.

And on the day, December 11 showed that we had the power to build such a movement. In an event bigger than any had expected, 40,000 of the city's 60,000 unionized workers stayed off the job. (Egan, 1996, January 10) General Motors' London diesel plant (2,200 workers), Cami Automotive in Ingersoll (2,300 workers), Ford Talbotville (2,500) -- all were shut for the day (Scotland, 1995) as were the Labatt brewery, Kellogg's, the McCormick cookie factory, 3M, the Accuride auto parts plant, the Canada Post sorting plant and many others. (Lahey & Edwards, 1995) All the work stoppages were illegal. Ford management received a court injunction banning pickets at the gates of the Talbotville plant, but workers from Cami showed up anyway, and picketed the plant shut. (Scotland, 1995) "Police watched the scene, but did not enforce the court injunction." (Lahey & Edwards, 1995) In weather that was minus 40 with the wind chill, 16,000 marched through the streets chanting "It's not as cold as Harris". (PolEconJournal II, 1995, January 8)

The days of action campaign had begun. The debate about moving to a province wide general strike was now the most important political issue by far in the Ontario workers' movement.

Harris' Omnibus Attacks

As the days of action campaign geared up, so did the Conservative attacks. One of the more menacing was Bill 26 (the "Omnibus" bill). In January of 1996, hearings for this bill were being met with jeers, catcalls, pickets and protests. The Conservatives presented the bill as if it were a little bit of housecleaning that would not need public hearings. But to many, it looked more like house demolition. The bill itself was over 200 pages long. It amended 44 different acts on the books in Ontario. A compendium attached to the bill photocopied the pages of the acts being amended. This compendium ran to 2,225 pages. This massive document was supposed to have been passed without public hearings!

Here's what the Conservatives wanted to accomplish with their housecleaning.

- Schedules F,G, H and I were the "health package" of the bill. They gave the Health Minister the power to close hospitals if s/he deemed it to be in the "public interest."
- Amendments to the "Private Hospitals Act" allowed the government to revoke a hospital licence and/or reduce the level of government financial assistance to hospitals without notice. It further protected the minister and the cabinet from any legal proceedings that might result from such actions.
- The bill went on to redefine the term "facility fee" to allow for an expanded use of user fees. It redefined the term "independent health facilities" to all such user-fee charging facilities to play a greater and greater role in the health care system.
- Seniors and people on social assistance would have to pay increased deductibles for drug plans. Drug prices would be deregulated, something that had happened in no other province.

- In amendments to the Health Insurance Act, all references to services being insured when they are “medically necessary” were removed and replaced with “under such conditions and limitations as may be prescribed.” This gave the ministry greater leeway in removing services from health insurance coverage. This opened up the possibility of a potential attack on the free-standing abortion clinics in the province, which had only recently won the right to have their services covered by health insurance.
- Schedule “J” effectively killed Pay Equity. It did this by ending the “proxy” method of pay equity as of January 1 1997. The proxy method was vital to real pay equity. Some sectors of the job market – in day cares, nursing homes, etc. – are comprised primarily of women and are very low paid. Their pay can’t be compared to groups of men doing the same work, because by and large this work is done by women. To get around this, pay equity legislation allowed for “proxy” comparisons – choosing a primarily male-dominated employment field requiring equivalent training, experience and skill, and comparing wages in those sectors to their “proxy” in the largely women low-paid job ghettos. Without the right to make such proxy comparisons, pay equity became a meaningless law for approximately 100,000 women in Ontario.
- Schedule M amended the municipal act and 12 other related statues. Most were designed to facilitate the privatization of utilities and to allow municipalities to charge user fees.
- Privatizations of local utilites used to require referenda. This would be done away with through Bill 26.
- The end of the bill, in particular “Schedule Q”, was a broad-side assault on trade union rights and wages. In the event of an impasse in collective bargaining, arbitrators would be required to consider “the employers’ ability to pay” when they arrived at a settlement.

With one hand, the Conservatives were ripping billions out of the system – \$1-billion from support to public shool boards for instance – massively reducing “the employers’ ability to pay.” Then with the other hand, they were giving extraordinary new powers to arbitrators to say “sorry, we have to slash jobs and wages because the employer doesn’t have the ability to pay.” (PolEconJournal II, 1996, January 21) (Bill 26 (Omnibus): Summary and Analysis for NDP Caucus, 1996)

Hamilton – the first great opportunity

Given the draconian intensification of the Conservative attacks after the first one-day general strike, it is not surprising that anger in the province increased, and with it the mass movement. This mass movement would see three great occasions where. had a province-wide general strike been called, there is little question it would have happened and received massive support. But on each occasion, the union leadership of the province of Ontario proved unequal to the task. And tragically, while confidence to fight the Conservatives was growing at the rank and file level, there were no alternative

organizations inside the union movement that could counter the vacillation and ultimate sell-out of the union leadership. Here we will examine the first of these great opportunities –the Hamilton general strike and Day of Action.

Hamilton days of action and the OPSEU strike

As the dust cleared after the London strike, the province was abuzz with anticipation. The very success of London had inspired activists everywhere. We could mobilize thousands. Workers would strike, and strike illegally, against both their boss and against the Conservatives. And the Conservatives' support – which had looked so massive in June – was withering quickly. Elected with 45 per cent of the vote in June, their support had climbed to 50 per cent in September. But by January of 1996, after the magnificent London general strike, it had dropped precipitously to 36 per cent. (Enviro-nics Research Group, 1999) The Harris majority was unravelling.

The enthusiasm was even greater when, on January 17, the OFL Executive Board announced that the next target of the days of action protest would be Hamilton. If there had been some questions about the possibility of shutting down London in a political one-day strike, there were no such doubts about Hamilton. This, one of the historic hearts of the industrial union movement in Ontario, would without a doubt, respond when the call came. A one-day illegal walkout was scheduled for Friday, February 23, followed by a community demonstration Saturday February 24.

And suddenly, a new element entered the picture. The 67,400 members of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU) had been working without a contract for months. They were up against the threat of massive layoffs from the Harris Tories. When the votes were counted on a poll that had begun February 15, OPSEU members had voted 66.7 per cent to take strike action. (Toughill, 1996) They would be in a legal strike position Monday, February 26. The anger inside OPSEU was exposed in the first hours of the strike on February 26, when in defiance of its main leadership, locals all over the province walked off the job simultaneously, not in the “staggered” fashion preferred by the union leadership. “Head office in Toronto can’t direct the regions,” said Ron Elliot, vice-president for the southwestern Ontario region. “We wanted it to be a disruption to the employer first, before we fully wanted to do it to the public,” said David Rapaport, union vice-president for the Toronto region, “...but when you start getting people who want to join the action as soon as possible, who are we to say no?” (Ibbitson, 1996, February 24)

The possibility for coordinating the Hamilton days of action with an OPSEU strike was clear to many. A ready-made plan was waiting to be implemented. Build the one-day Hamilton strike on the Friday. Link both it and the mass demonstration on Saturday on Saturday to the struggle of the OPSEU workers. And then use these two events to build a series of escalating solidarity strike actions beginning Monday, the first legal strike day

for OPSEU. A province-wide general strike, against the Conservatives and in solidarity with OPSEU, was both possible and necessary.

And for anyone who participated in the Hamilton events, this was abundantly clear. The city was shut on the Friday. The federal agency responsible for tracking labour disputes said that 100,000 struck. (Research and Analysis Unit, 1996) An eyewitness report on the day captured the mood.

Workers came from all over the province. I spoke with a hospital worker from London, transit workers from Chatham and a group of teachers who were still lively in spite of having driven all night from Sault Ste. Marie. It is a measure of how passionate workers are in their hatred of Harris and his right-wing government, that they are willing to go to great lengths, literally, to make their anger heard. While it was significant that supporters came from across the province, the success of the strike depended on the workers of Hamilton and district. And they stayed away from work in their thousands. (Bell, 1996)

The next day saw the largest labour mobilization ever in Ontario history. Organizers had anticipated 50,000 would come out and confront the 1,000 Conservatives huddled in their convention centre “behind serried ranks of grim police officers.” But more than that number arrived from out of town alone in a convoy of 1,400 buses. In all between 100,000 and 120,000 people took to the streets. “By 11 am, the park where the march was mobilizing had long since filled up, and had overflowed into the grass and mud. And still they came, banners flying, signs blowing in the wind.” (PolEconJournal II, 1996, March 4)

And on the Monday, OPSEU did walk out, in an enthusiastic and surprisingly popular strike against the Harris Tories. Everywhere, strikers were speculating on the OFL putting its resources into building a general strike in solidarity with OPSEU. “People are ready to move the struggle up to a new level because they know that’s what it will take to win. According to Leslyn Jones, President of OPSEU local 515: ‘If we have a general strike I believe it’s going to show [Harris] that it’s not a few people, but thousands and thousands of people, and that is really going to do it.’ ” (Baker, 1996)

Petitions began circulating, demanding that the OFL leadership recognize that “the Harris government intends to use the OPSEU strike to try to smash the union.” Further, that “the enormous success of the Hamilton general strike and days of action shows the solidarity and anger which exists amongst working people in Ontario.” Therefore we “call on the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) to call a province-wide general strike in support of the workers of OPSEU.” (PolEconJournal II, 1996, March 4) But the OFL did nothing. The buses rolled into Hamilton, and rolled out again, and the OPSEU strikers were left to fight alone.

The major daily newspapers, in the run-up to the OPSEU strike, had been replete with coverage about how a strike by civil servants would prove manifestly unpopular. (Brennan, 1996, February 23) These reports proved to be completely wrong. The strike struck a deep chord with the working class public, who saw in the strikers the face of resistance to the Harris Tories. But it is hard not to draw the conclusion, that the pessimism of the media was reflected in the passivity of the senior Ontario union leadership.

The OPSEU workers waged a magnificent fight. For five weeks, they challenged the Conservatives, confronted the pepper-spray and batons of the police, and battled to keep the scabs out of the workplace. There was a tremendous sentiment for solidarity with the strike. Steelworkers and Autoworkers joined the lines, as did postal workers and teachers. The strike was the dominant theme at Toronto's International Women's Day (IWD) event in March. OPSEU's "No justice, no peace" picket signs became a standard of the labour movement across the province.

But the union leaders refused to call wider action. Even Leah Casselman, head of OPSEU, refused to advance the call for wider solidarity action. She "received a petition of 1,400 names calling for a general strike in support of the OPSEU strike. Yet she did not raise it at the March 12 meeting of heads of unions." (Waugh, Why are OFL leaders dithering?, 1996)

The aftermath of the OPSEU strike

The OPSEU strike was certainly a lost opportunity, for both the political fight against Harris and the economic fight of OPSEU workers for job security and wages. The OPSEU workers had fought hard and long and preserved their union against an employer that had wanted them broken. But without a solidarity general strike from the rest of labour – a strike that was eminently possible – they did not win an outright victory. The Conservatives were quick to take their revenge.

April 11, they announced a series of cuts whose changes were "almost too numerous to list" in the words of veteran reporter John Ibbitson. Among these changes, 10,600 of the provinces 81,000 public servants would lose their jobs over two years including:

- 2,170 or almost half of the Ministry of Natural Resources' 5,000 employees;
- 954, or half the staff at the Ministry of Agriculture;
- 1,239 in the Ministry of Transportation;
- 954 from the Ministry of Agriculture;
- 919 from the Ministry of Community and Social Services;
- 752 from the Environment and Energy;
- 682 from Management Board.

This was less than the 13,000 to 27,000 job cuts that had been floated before the strike, but represented devastating job losses nonetheless. Some of the best militants who held

the lines through the bitter dispute, would find themselves out of work within a matter of months. The business plan also included further attacks on the poor. Welfare benefits were eliminated for 17,000 single parents and couples attending university and college. (Ibbitson, 1996, April 12) On top of this, the Conservatives continued their push to introduce workfare. (Beauchesne, 1996) By now, the Conservatives had announced “\$8 billion in cuts over three years to social programs, school boards, hospitals, municipalities.” (O’hanlon, 1996) The need for wider action to stop these cuts was growing by the month.

But throughout 1996, the same pattern repeated itself. Anger against the Conservatives and enthusiasm for action against the cuts remained high. Days of action were called in city after city. But there was little if any thought by the union leadership that was now at the front of the anti-Tory movement, of combining these political protests with the ongoing economic struggles of workers in their unions.

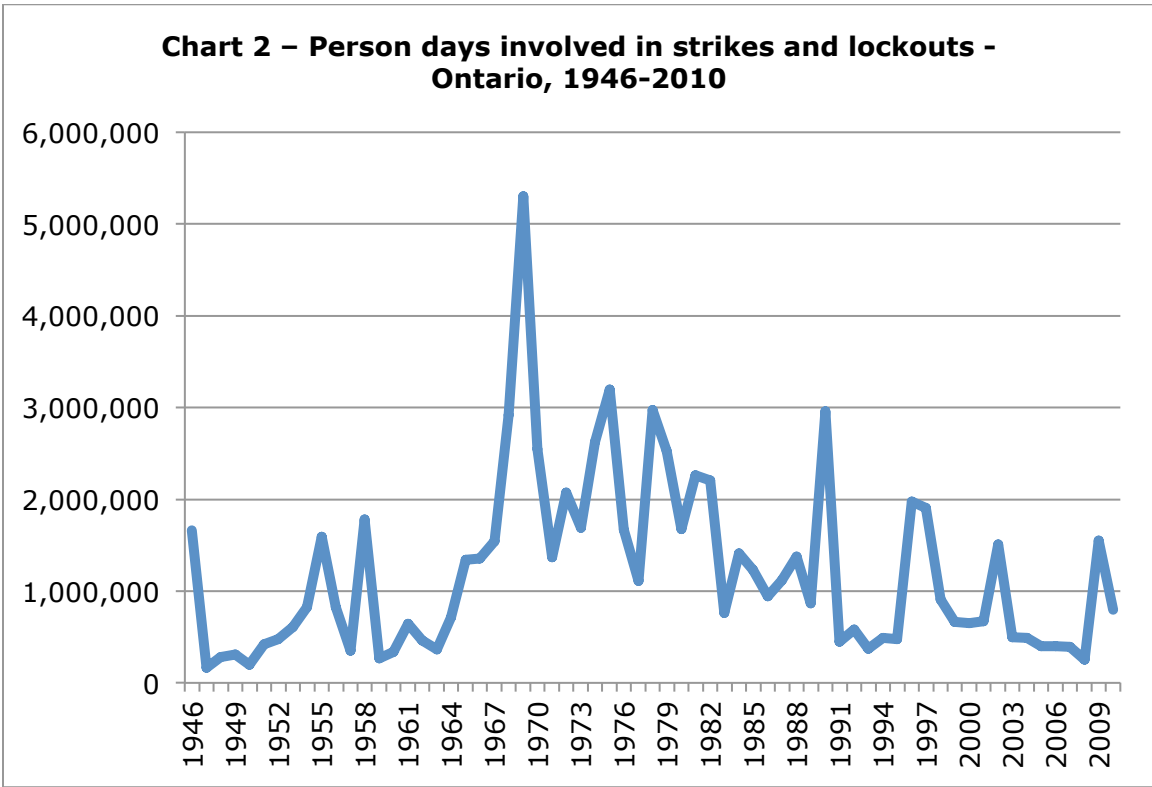
Some preliminary conclusions

Future papers will examine the other two lost opportunities – Toronto’s general strike in October of 1996, and the two-week, illegal, province-wide teachers’ strike in October and November 1997. This paper has a more limited purpose – to sketch out the origins of Ontario’s Days of Action. Any conclusions, therefore, must be preliminary and tentative. Here, one main point will be emphasized. The “Days of Action” moment presents itself at one level as a classic confrontation between a party sympathetic to big business (the Conservatives) and the “serried ranks” of organized labour. That dimension is of course present. But what the paper has tried to show, is that without the activity and presence of thousands outside the ranks of organized labour, the Days of Action movement would not have even begun. The “serried ranks” of labour were in fact quite passive in the first months of the Mike Harris government. It was the actions of students, social assistance recipients, community-based social movements and heretofore relatively isolated left-activists, who provided the initial spark for the movement. It is no longer tenable, if it ever was, to conceptualize class struggle as solely a workplace-based affair involving as agents only those organized into unions. This lesson is clearly of pressing importance in the newly-industrializing world where millions exist in a kind of “class limbo” – half-way between the countryside and the city, half-way between a life of hustling on the streets and collective labour in a sweatshop. But even in a fully advanced industrial society such as Canada, where the question of urbanization was settled a long time ago, this “broadening” of our sense of class and class struggle remains critical.

Many other issues have been implicitly raised here, but will have to wait for the longer research project. Throughout the story, there is an ongoing tension between the base of the movement – both in the unions and outside – and the institutional representatives of that movement itself. It is too simple to paint a picture of a rebellious rank and file, chomping at the bit, being held back by “misleaders of the class.” However, what can be said is that the routinism and conservatism and resulting lack of imagination and vision

displayed by the principal representatives of the trade union movement, again and again led to squandered opportunities, and confusion in the movement. This was clear right from the movement's beginning. The anti-Harris movement began in the context of mass anger over the attack on social assistance, and the poorest of the poor. The 21.6 percent cut in social assistance rates was horrific to many. But this did not galvanize the union leaders into action. It was Bill 7, which was seen as an affront to their authority and influence viz. both government and the employer, that moved the anger from the streets to the union offices. This is interestingly symbolic of a leadership more attuned to their own institutional concerns, than they are to the plight of the poorest in the province. Implicit in that tension are a whole host of issues that need to be developed in much greater detail.

Finally, this tension between the institutional representatives of the workers' movement, and the movement itself (the "rank and file"), needs to be approached very concretely through an appreciation of the ups and downs of the class struggle at the workplace. Unions present themselves in two different ways in modern society – as agents of collective bargaining, and as agents of mass struggle, typically represented through actions on the picket line in strikes and lockouts. The background to the Days of Action in Ontario in the 1990s – not dissimilar from the experience in the United States, Britain and other advanced industrial countries – was a background of many years where the level of class struggle, as measured in the statistics of strikes and lockouts, was exceedingly low. Chart 2 (Statistics Canada, 1946-2010) documents this, showing a steady decline from the peak levels of strike activity in Ontario in the late 1960s, to the very low levels in 1992, 1993 and 1994, the years just preceding the Days of Action when the NDP was in office in the province. In terms of the "social impact" of these strikes, the decline is actually much steeper than is represented here, as the population in Ontario in the 1990s was far higher than in the 1960s. In such an environment, it will not be surprising that the often conservative traits of the institutionalized collective bargaining routine would come to dominate the union leaderships, while the characteristics appropriate to the "war of manoeuvre" on the picket line, would recede.



But this is more than enough for one paper. For the people of Ontario, the Days of Action from 1995 until 1998 remain a very big experience, one that shaped a generation of workers, students, and anti-poverty activists. Its lessons are still being discussed today, more than a decade after the fact. Indeed, with the shift to austerity again a matter of daily political talk and action, there has been renewed interest in the Days of Action experience throughout the province. Perhaps some of this discussion of the recent past, will have relevance to the movements against austerity of today and tomorrow, here and in other countries.

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A note on sources

The author was a full participant in many of the events described in this analysis. For an equivalent event today, I would use, for my own writings, material from my web-blog, *PolEconAnalysis*. Modern “political blogging,” of which this is a sample, actually represents something quite old – the original longer versions and “first drafts” of articles – some of which make it to the printed page, some of which settle into the “dust of history”. The forthcoming weblog *PolEconJournal* will be this author’s modest attempt to make his own political journal, from the pre-blogging years, available and accessible to the Internet generation. The articles on which this blog will be based, exist in print form in an unpublished collection, organized into four archives. The archive relevant to this paper is *PolEconJournal II: Days of Action*, (Kellogg, 1995-1998), and articles from this archive have been cited throughout as PolEconJournal II, the dates given indicating the actual date of writing, as in a contemporary weblog.

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