REMEMBERING TEXPACK: NATIONALISM, INTERNATIONALISM, AND MILITANCY IN CANADIAN UNIONS IN THE 1970s

Joan Sangster

In 1971, the word “Texpack” became a flashpoint of political attention, debate, and anger for labour activists across Canada. Many mobilized to support strikers at Texpack’s small textile firm in Brantford, Ontario, though some trade unionists from the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) turned their backs on the independent Canadian union, the Canadian Textile and Chemical Workers Union (CTCU), leading the strike. The significance of Texpack lay not simply in this stark manifestation of schisms within the house of labour, but rather in the strike’s central role as a touchstone for political debates concerning economic and Left nationalism, and what kind of unions best served Canadian workers. This article explores the strike as a microcosm of broader political struggles of the period, particularly questions of nationalism and international unions. Texpack also revealed other social and political upheavals of the period: the changing gender and ethnic profile of unionized workers; the emerging connections between labour, the New Left, and feminist politics; rank-and-file rebellions within the union movement; the shaky foundations of the Fordist accord, and finally, the beginnings of intensified assaults of capital on unions in Canada. Moreover, the strike suggested important — if sometimes ignored — lessons concerning the redefinition of union militancy and the role of the courts in policing labour.

Capital, Labour, and Unions in Local Context A small manufacturing and railroad centre, Brantford was dominated by the Massey Ferguson farm
equipment company whose predominantly white and male workers were economic beneficiaries of the post-WW II “Fordist accord.” In contrast, Texpack’s workforce represented a “second tier”\(^1\) of manufacturing workers, marginalized by gender and ethnicity, yet also increasing in numbers as growing numbers of women worked for pay outside the home — and were also increasingly unionized. By 1971, women comprised 37 percent of the Brantford workforce, 28 percent of manufacturing labour.\(^2\) At Texpack, they were approximately 80 percent of all workers. A surge in European immigration also provided new workers, who, like immigrants before them, survived by creating family economies based on pooled resources of paid and unpaid labour. While at least 70 percent of the Brantford population designated themselves as British, there were small groups of newcomers,\(^3\) especially Italian and Polish women, visible as Texpack workers.

A manufacturer of surgical and medical supplies as well as industrial filters, Texpack began as a family-owned enterprise, Stericloth Products, in 1935. It became a publicly traded company in 1964, but was bought out a year later from the Stren family by the American-based multinational American Hospital Supply (AHS).\(^4\) By 1970, no family members remained as managers, a shift that was probably significant to the worsening labour relations at the plant. AHS operated in more than 100 countries, providing a vast array of hospital goods; its attempts to create a vertically integrated model of hospital consumption, along with innovations in entirely disposable items, was a timely intervention into the expanding Canadian market after the implementation of medicare.\(^5\)

Making this branch plant a more profitable part of the AHS empire meant reorganizing, downsizing, and taking a hard line on the wage bill. Wages were a central reason for the strike, as many women took home barely $60 a week. The union, led by an executive dominated by women (unusual for the times), wanted a $14/week raise, a cost of living formula, and an extension of health benefits, then paid fully only to single workers. It also opposed a new, sweeping residual rights clause for management. Grievance and seniority procedures were also at stake; the latter was especially crucial to women for recent Ontario legislation mandated “a single schedule” of job classifications and wage rates, irrespective of sex. Texpack, like other
employers, had simply renamed their “male/female” schedule with a new nomenclature as a means of maintaining lower female job rates. Texpack responded that it would offer only $4 a week more, with any other increases dependant on all rest periods being given up.

Initially, the strike appeared to be an uneven match of powers, pitting the CTCU, with meagre resources, against a large, flush multinational. But AHS underestimated the political acumen of CTCU leaders, Madeleine Parent and Kent Rowley, as well as the determined militance of its predominantly female labour force. Texpack was organized into the CTCU in 1958, only four years after the CTCU was set up as an alternative to the international unions in the CLC, and its politics can be understood only in the context of textile organizing since the 1940s, a story still largely untold in Canadian labour history. Rowley and Parent had previously spearheaded the organization of textile workers in Quebec under the auspices of the AFL’s United Textile Workers of America (UTWA), leading significant strikes there in 1946 and 1952, for which they had been persecuted and arrested (Rowley was imprisoned) by the antilabour premier Maurice Duplessis. Yet in 1952, Rowley and Parent were dismissed by American union leaders who wanted to end a strike and accept a deal that these Canadian leaders believed was a sell out. Their interpretation of this coup is substantiated in the newly opened archives of the rival CIO union, the Textile Workers Union of America (TWUA); a confidential memo reveals that American AFL and CIO leaders bemoaned their inability to get rid of Rowley and Parent “legally” and conferred with a “third party in Washington” about how to remove them. Smeared by the UTWA as supposed communists, Rowley and Parent were disgusted with the undemocratic nature of union politics emanating from the American head office and became convinced that Canadians had to control their own unions, as internationals were more likely linked to conservative politics and corruption.

**On Strike** The 1971 strike emerged after months of failed negotiations brought the two parties to a standstill. The mainstream press, reflecting the lingering power of the male breadwinner ideology, repeatedly referred to female strikers as earners of a “second” income, yet this ignored the
importance of their wages to the family economy. In 1971, for instance, “Carol,” a married mother with two public school-aged children, began working on an evening shift that allowed her to share child care with her blue-collar husband. When she had to accept a longer afternoon and evening shift, she found an after-school babysitter and prepared family dinners ahead of time. Her wages were just as important to the family economy as they were for her younger coworker Louisa, who had emigrated with her family from southern Italy when she was eleven, and by sixteen was working in Texpack, where a sister also had a job. During the strike, Louisa babysat a niece so an older sister could go out to work, then did an evening picket. Both her waged and unpaid work helped sustain an extended family economy held together by those who, as she remembers, were “always so busy, just trying to make a living.”

While wages were key to the strike, the tenor of the workplace had aggravated the situation. Some supervisors, two women recall, had a “threatening” manner, so that “you were almost afraid to go to the washroom … [if you took too long they would be] checking up on you.” At the same time, the labour process facilitated close employee ties: women moved around the factory from job to job, some helped each other make their quotas, and there were few internal job hierarchies (other than the division into men’s and women’s jobs). A work culture of informal exchange and support existed, and language differences did not, according to interviewees, cause severe divisions. One Italian-Canadian worker remembers other women speaking an Italian dialect that even she did not understand, so she preferred English as the dominant language of the workplace.

When the strike was called, the Company tried unsuccessfully to call back its laid-off workers, then began advertising for workers in a Hamilton newspaper under the fictitious name “White Industries.” These strike-breakers were escorted into the plant in buses with wire mesh windows, given protection along the highway by the Hamilton police, the Ontario Provincial Police, and Brantford police, and driven by private security men. The Company announced that it was not paying vacation pay due the strikers, and boasted to employees in letters that they had defeated unions in the past and would do so again. Later letters were even more adamant,
warning that “our corporation has weathered strikes of up to nine months duration against such worthy foes as the Teamsters, who have been defeated and decertified … by former striking employees.” AHS also took out full-page ads in the local paper, and attempted to discredit Rowley and Parent, claiming they were manipulating the strikers for their own political “communist” ends, a label that clearly worried some union members.

What began as a peaceful picket line was thus soon transformed into a confrontational one. On 20 July, a female striker was sent to hospital after being knocked down by a truck leaving the plant, and five male picketers were arrested for throwing bottles and other debris at the truck, breaking a window. Within a few days, the Company sought an injunction to reduce the number of pickets. Their request was denied by Justice Campbell Grant, who noted that there had been no damage to property, violence, or injuries since the one incident. However, the strike-breaking buses, which refused to stop so that picketers could talk to those inside, inflamed the strikers and their supporters, and on 5 August a bus windshield was shattered by a rock. Former strikers spoke repeatedly of the hated buses: “the worst was the buses, with those people on the inside, waving their paychecks at us … thumbing their noses at us …. It got our adrenalin going.” One striker said that the buses represented everyone’s fears that they may never have a job again. Arrests continued, not only of picketers, but of Texpack personnel crossing the line, who, along with a bus driver, were charged with “carrying a dangerous weapon.” On 11 August, the Company’s second attempt to secure an injunction was successful in the Ontario Supreme Court. Pickets were limited to four people, covering three entrances, with Justice Moorhouse scolding the union for bringing this upon themselves. Although the Company had to prove under the new 1970 legislation that efforts to obtain police support had been unsuccessful, Moorhouse impatiently waved aside the CTCU lawyers when they declared their right to cross-examine Company witnesses.

Injunctions were still a raw issue with the labour movement, despite the abolition of despised ex parte injunctions in the wake of the recent Tilco strike in Peterborough. Unionists maintained that injunctions invariably became the death knell for a strike, facilitating the use of strike-breakers, and
that they often spurred more violence, by highlighting the workers’ lack of legal power. The injunction might have been fatal at Texpack, save for a strategy of militant disregard as supporters continued to mount demonstrations on the public streets nearby.

The CTCU drew aid from fellow unionists in the Council of Canadian Unions (CCU), the umbrella federation for independent Canadian unions, and, more significant, from some international unions. Despite the antipathy of the CLC leadership, maverick leaders of Hamilton’s powerful United Steel Workers of America Local 1005 arrived on the Texpack lines on 14 August to offer their solidarity and a cheque for $500. Nine steelworkers, including Cec Taylor and Harry Greenwood, were promptly arrested. The Brantford District Labour Council was instructed by the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) not to support the CTCU or they would be “rightfully punished,” leaving the Council divided, able only to muster a resolution supporting the workers, but not the union. But international union members ignored directions from above, with the UAW offering the strikers use of their hall to organize. Hundreds packed a meeting called by the Brantford Labour Council in support of the strikers, and, as one staffer from the rival TWUA who attended remembers, intervening to criticize the CTCU would have been politically foolish.

By August, demonstrations became more inflamed, and on the 26th, riot police were called out as demonstrators threw rocks, rocked police cruisers, and set fire to a dumpster on Company property. The majority of arrests were women strikers who refused to disperse, with one pointing a Company water hose at the plant and opening the valves. The next day, hundreds of supporters found themselves confronted with Billy sticks and an army of police in visored helmets who dragged demonstrators away to waiting paddy wagons. Police marched through the picketers’ canteen tent, taking it to the ground, though this was not the first time. For many women strikers, the police belligerence was a shocking eye-opener:

“I was with Madeleine Parent,” one remembered, “with my three children at the other end of the road that Texpack is on …. We couldn’t believe our eyes, these policemen there in full riot gear. They came at us …. Madeleine and I went around to the tent …. The police were using their Billy clubs to
destroy all the personal effects of the strikers. It was wilful damage [and] if it had been anybody other than the police they would have been arrested.”

Twenty-six arrests were made as police waded into a crowd that defied an order to disperse.

The next week, a Labour Day parade led by Texpack workers carrying a Canadian flag was far less volatile; by this time, a meeting between trade unionists and a police officer from Hamilton with crowd control experience had attempted to work out less confrontational police tactics. But by the end of strike, more than 60 people had been charged with at least 100 offences, the majority of which were vague “watching and besetting” or “obstructing a police officer” clauses in the criminal code. In Brantford, at least 19 of the 51 charges were laid against women. Rowley was also targetted for arson after a photo caught him smoking his pipe while a dumpster burned behind him (though he was far away, his look of nonchalance obviously irritated the police).

By early September, another political current of support, from the Waffle (the Left-nationalist caucus within the NDP), had been added to the struggle. After some internal debate about alienating the internationals, those who believed that there should be “no question of their support” won the day. The Waffle Labour Committee saw Texpack as proof of the need for immediate regulation of foreign investment as well as a socialist strategy for the Canadian economy; their political analysis became part of the language of the strike, with Mel Watkins offering the warning that Canada was in danger of turning into a “warehouse” for US multinationals. At least 200 Brantford union members attended a meeting organized by the Waffle Labour Committee on 4 September, and Waffle members also looked after the legal fund. Waffle leaflets condemned Texpack as an “industrial low-wage ghetto” and urged the NDP to make this an election issue, demanding public ownership and workers’ control of Texpack and similar companies. Wafflers were also visible on the picket line; during one demonstration of support, 14 people were arrested, including Daniel Drache (who laid assault charges against the constable who tackled him), Robert Laxer, Jim Laxer, and Steven Penner. Waffler Mel Watkins had already been arrested, along with
UAW Left-winger Alister Campbell, for obstructing police. While Waffle members had considerable visibility in press coverage, other socialists and Leftists were also on the picket line, reflecting the growing presence of ultra-Left organizations in Canada. Left-wing nationalists in the Canadian Liberation Front were present, as well as members of the Canadian Party of Labour, though the latter clearly were not welcomed by the CTCU. Nor were members of the Communist Party, who came to share their criticisms of the strike with Rowley.

While they recognized that the police could be threatening, some strikers still blamed these “outsiders” for the escalation of violence, “doing things like throwing beer bottles at the police.” Yet outside intervention was decisive for the strike as it was effectively politicized, spreading outwards from Brantford to become a provincial, even national event, with injunctions, strike-breakers, policing, and American corporate power as the key concerns. Supporters also moved the picket line to new geographical locations. Aided by 1005 members, the UE, the Teamsters, the Waffle, and CLF nationalists, the CTCU located the ever-changing starting point of scab buses in Hamilton and tried to prevent their departure. On 10 September, an enthusiastic John Lang, then working at York as an academic (later a union staffer with the CTCU and the CAW), jumped on a bus hood to detach its wires and was thrown aside, sustaining broken ribs and a broken ankle. When fellow academic Ian Lumsden went to his defence, he was severely injured, suffering multiple leg fractures that eventually spawned a lawsuit for damages. These roving pickets played an essential part in the strike; by 14 September, the united front in Hamilton had all but stopped the buses.

In Toronto, strike sympathizers organized a demonstration of about 500 at Queen’s Park on 16 September, and later staged a public meeting of support at OISE. Brantford NDP MPP Mak Makarchuk pressed cabinet ministers behind the scenes to intervene, and used the Legislature to highlight picket line intimidation: What is the “quality of justice in Ontario,” he asked, that permits an employer at Texpack to slug a woman in the face, blacken her eye, hit her body when she is knocked down, and not be charged? Meanwhile, “picketers are jailed?” Local unions across Ontario (including
CLC ones) also wrote to the government, urging their intervention and denouncing the use of injunctions and overzealous policing. One London UAW local complained about the “gestapo tactics” they had witnessed, including “one incident in which a picket was held, bent over double by three officers, while a fourth repeatedly punched him [leaving him] with cuts to the face. Bruised and bleeding he was thrown into a cruiser, along with our local president.”

Two other external factors came to bear on the strike. First, on 12 September, Premier Bill Davis called a provincial election and there was reason to assume that the government pressed its mediators to end a strike offering embarrassing media coverage of raw class conflict. Oral sources indicate that pressure was also brought to bear on the government by a group of lawyers close to the Hamilton business community, for the latter feared that a general strike might engulf Hamilton workers if Texpack was not resolved. Again, the Hamilton connection was important. Rebel steel leaders arranged for a meeting between Madeleine Parent and federal MP and Labour Minister John Monroe, at which Madeleine made the union’s case about the Company’s unsafe sanitary practices — the “bandage” issue discussed below.

Second, the conflict between the TWUA and the CTCU became an embarrassment for the OFL and CLC leadership. CLC-affiliated members were disobeying their leadership by picketing, offering the unsettling spectre of a rebellious rank and file. Texpack secretly made plans to reopen its suburban Toronto (Rexdale) plant that had fallen into disuse in order to avoid picketers, and within two days of its public announcement on 29 September, the rival TWUA announced that it had unionized 100 percent of the Rexdale workers. An anti-company and anti-TWUA picket developed in Rexdale, and arrests began anew. Although the OFL had refused its support to the CTCU, it had been shamed into writing a letter denouncing the use of strike-breakers and injunctions at Texpack. Parent now asked them publicly why they were allowing the TWUA to act as strike-breakers in Rexdale.

Some unionists — now including CUPE locals and other “neutrals” — petitioned the CLC leadership to intervene on behalf of the CTCU. These
CLC members believed that the TWUA had colluded with the Company, a fact also suggested in the TWUA’s untapped archives. The union kept the Company’s plan to relocate a secret, yet warned its staffers in a confidential letter what would unfold.\textsuperscript{33} As former TWUA staffer Ed Seymour remembers, the chief TWUA organizer, Bud Clarke, had been dedicated to raiding CTCU for years, claiming they were dangerous communists. Signing up the Rexdale plant through a “backdoor deal” with the Company was thus “not beyond” Clarke as he was very “pro-American” and immensely hostile to Parent and Rowley. Some younger staffers like Seymour, less invested in these Cold War battles, increasingly saw this anticommunist campaign as somewhat “ludicrous.”\textsuperscript{34}

Texpack, in other words, was encouraging members to question the international union leadership; their treatment of Canadian unions was becoming unpalatable even to some within the house of official labour. Elements from both the CLC and big businesses therefore wanted a settlement, with the latter exerting some behind-the-scenes authority. The Company’s negotiator, flown in from the United States, met with Ontario’s skillful chief mediator, W. H. Dickie, now assigned to the strike. The American negotiator, according to Parent, eventually even irritated the bureaucrats, with his obvious negotiating tactic of loudly demanding the government secretary “book him a flight to Chicago immediately” when things were not going his way. On 15 October, a settlement was reached, with increased wages of 17 cents an hour, better health coverage, and better vacations. Three days later, members ratified the deal. After months of behind-the-scenes negotiations, in January 1972 the special crown attorney assigned to the case withdrew 64 of the charges laid during the strike, arguing that the now invalid injunction made the charges moot.\textsuperscript{35}

\textbf{The American Empire} A small victory before increasingly defensive times, the 1971 strike was both a reflection and arbiter of prevailing Left political culture, particularly debates concerning the American Empire. In the early 1970s, the deleterious effects of escalating American foreign direct investment were front page concerns for Canadians, raised not only by socialists, but also by some maverick Liberals like Water Gordon.\textsuperscript{36} The radical press
This Magazine, Canadian Dimension, Canadian Forum, and the Last Post — contained long, intensive debates on the relationship between Canadian nationalism and socialism, and Canadian Dimension was so sympathetically inclined to Left nationalism that Marc Zwelling claimed his article for them on Texpack was altered by the editors to denounce the international unions — something he had not intended. The academic and activist Left were enmeshed in deliberations about the Canadian “comprador economy,” and crowded campus teach-ins across the country debated everything from independent trade unions to banning the hiring of American professors. A range of views on nationalism existed, but the question of Canadian autonomy was taken for granted as a political issue. Nor was this simply a sentimental issue of wrapping oneself in the flag, for workers increasingly worried about their material future in a branch plant economy juxtaposed to a more protectionist United States. After Texpack, Mine Mill leader Jim Tester suggested that Texpack had so successfully mobilized “the national feeling of workers” that the CCU should capitalize on this, sending the union president on a two-month speaking tour.

Texpack seemed to offer a case study of American economic power: with no laws on foreign takeovers, the business was easily absorbed into AHS and there was evidence that it was downsizing, shifting Texpack from factory to warehouse. The CTCU argued that Texpack was moving its profitable operations to other plants in the United States as well as repackaging American-made goods at Texpack, slapping “made in Canada” labels on them. Three days into the strike, they accused Texpack of dumping American bandages, made during World War II and the Korean war, on the Canadian market without resterilizing them. The fallout from this revelation was profound. Trade unionists in British Columbia recommended that hospital workers refuse to use Texpack products and a group of university professors urged the government to charge the company under the Combines and Investigations Act for false advertising. Eventually, the Saskatchewan government instituted a ban on the products in their hospitals. John Lang pursued a charge through the federal regulatory agency, and in 1972 Texpack finally pled guilty to false advertising, paying a paltry $300 fine. But the bandage revelation politicized the strike in a manner that brought the issue of foreign
ownership home to the larger public. Reflecting on this “warehousing of Canada” issue, Parent later noted that most strikes are never just economic contests, they often expose larger political issues that must be publicized if the union is to win on the picket line.40

It was not just the potential loss of Canadian jobs but also the arrogance of American corporations that aroused anger. The company fired five picketers for alleged misconduct, contravening the Ontario Labour Relations Act (it was later forced to reinstate them), hired private American security personnel, and cited American examples of their ability to defeat unions. It appeared to be all-out war by a heartless American corporate Goliath on small Canadian David. Policing issues reinforced the image of the ugly American empire. Although private policing had a long history, there was growth in this industry in the early 1970s, and AHS made use of both Toronto’s Anning Security Services and the Windsor-based Angus Protection. Ironically, during the strike, both Canadian companies were absorbed into the American-based multinational Wackenhut Corporation, now known for its involvement in the privatization of prisons in the United States.

There were some Left critics of this focus on American capitalism who argued that a cyclical recession in world capitalism was creating broader patterns of deindustrialization in the West. They warned that the American working class was not benefitting from this deindustrialization, and that activists should eschew a naive view of the Canadian bourgeoisie as mere accountants for American capital, or as exemplars of a kinder Canadian capitalism. But the intensity of debates about the negative effects of American economic domination at a time when there was apprehension about the decay of racially segregated American cities and opposition to the war in Vietnam (which some American union leaders supported) created strong anxieties about the American empire in Canada, shaping discussions that ranged beyond Texpack into the Left and the labour movement.

The Courts and the Picket Line: The Law and Class Struggle When the injunction was first issued, some women strikers called Parent at strike headquarters, asking for advice. Her response was a lesson in realism: it is your choice to obey or not, but if you do obey, we will likely lose the strike,
and if not, you may find yourself in jail, although we will do our best to get you out.\textsuperscript{41} While following the ruling about four pickets at the Company gates, the union continued to rally people on the public roads surrounding the plant, as the only means of stopping strikebreaking. At the same time, they embarked on a concerted battle within the courts. CTCU lawyers contested Moorhouse’s claim that they did not have an automatic right to cross-examine Company witnesses, particularly because they might not come with “clean hands,” having provoked the conduct being complained about.\textsuperscript{42} Their appeal to the Ontario Supreme Court case rested on two arguments: first, by contravening labour and other laws, the Company disqualified its right to use an injunction, and second, the union had an unlimited right to cross-examine witnesses.\textsuperscript{43} On the second issue they won, as the appeal judges agreed that cross-examination would have shown if police protection was adequately used. This precedent-setting case, T expack v. Rowley, became a key legacy of the conflict, setting standards that gave all unions one more small means of opposing the time-honoured use of injunctions as a means of “structuring the labour market to the advantage of capital.”\textsuperscript{44}

However, if the union had spent all its energies in court, it would have lost the strike, as this decision was not handed down until the strike ended on 15 October. While the CTCU engaged strategically with the law, it never forgot that the picket line was the crux of the struggle. Parent’s advice differed from that of more conservative union leaderships, for she understood that a willingness to “disobey” was sometimes the only way to win a strike. Similarly, Rowley’s view that class struggle was a reality and that strikers may be “mercilessly crushed if they don’t take action” was roundly criticized in \textit{The Globe and Mail} as too “confrontational.”\textsuperscript{45} One might expect this from the conservative press, but such views were shared by some international unions, also adverse to the CTCU’s embrace of politicized, militant struggle.

Use of the state’s legal machinery, then, was seen by the CTCU as one among many strategies; any gains, even if small in monetary terms, could be significant in building a sense of workers’ empowerment. For example, the CTCU also pursued an unemployment insurance claim on behalf of
some strikers that also became precedent setting. Marking a wonderful example of Parent’s ability to take on legalistic, frustrating bureaucracies in a determined, relentless manner, the UIC claim was filed after the Company, trying to demoralize the strikers, claimed it was bringing in 80 replacements. Parent knew they had already publicly stated that they were fully operational with 80 workers. Using this yardstick, a claim for UIC could be made. Local President Ann Atfield and others filed for UIC (despite the scoffing of some other unions), and although the original claim was refused, Parent took this to the UIC Board of Referees, which supported her, and when UIC refused to comply, finally to the ultimate UIC Umpire in Ottawa, Justice Kerr. She won.46

The relationship between the law, workers, and the state was crucial to subsequent union struggles in the 1970s and 1980s as capital pressed to restrict the power of labour, and as unions fought plant shutdowns. Nor was this more punitive approach limited to the private sector; as Leo Panitch and Donald Swartz have shown, public sector leaders were imprisoned and fined, unions charged, injunctions applied.47 Getting legal redress through legislation or court cases was one route, but workers also found that using “ca canny” (go slow) and other workplace tactics was sometimes a crucial means to secure meagre compensation.48 While the law offers tantalizing ideological appeal as a means of legal redress, it often falls short of its promise, inevitably limited by the structural correspondence between the state and capital.49

Understanding this dynamic, and thus the need for a double-pronged strategy, was the pragmatic product of CTCU leaders’ long experience organizing against a repressive state in Quebec, their radical commitment to militant struggle, and their understanding that the kind of workers they were organizing — underpaid immigrant women — were outside the Fordist accord and could not simply rely on industrial legality to secure their future.

**Capital Moves/International Unions Equivocate** Texpack also underscored the danger of capital moving wherever it could find cheaper, non-unionized, or acquiescent labour, whether that was within a province, a country, or outside of them. Because pickets were mobile within southern
Ontario, Texpack’s strategy of reopening the Rexdale plant faltered, but if Texpack had tried moving farther afield, to a northern area of Ontario or to the Maritimes, would it have succeeded? Even though we now equate capital flight with relocation to the *Maquiladoras*, such trends, as Jefferson Cowie and Bryan Palmer have shown, have long roots in North American history, occurring both within and beyond national borders as corporations sought to alter the balance of labour and employer power — sometimes by changing the gender and race of their workers as well as their geographical location.50

The mobility of international capital was one argument used by international unions against national/ist Canadian unions. A long tradition of trade union internationalism could be used as an ideological hook for antinationalist argument, though I doubt one heard the “Internationale” at CLC events. Their aversion to Canadian unions was shaped in part by anxieties that an anti-American nationalism would become a false diversion from more important economic struggles. It was also linked decisively to long-time, cross-border anticommunist alliances within the internationals, and to unions’ desire to share in the enhanced resources (such as strike funds) and power that internationals were presumed to offer. A few critics within the CLC pointed out that this “power” came with strings attached as Canadian dues were siphoned off to the United States, with Canadian staff positions and collective agreements subject to political approval by American head offices. When CUPE’s Gil Levine and others in a reform caucus attempted to push the CLC to endorse extremely moderate levels of Canadian control, CLC executives bluntly told CUPE they should fire him.51

No one was more impassioned about American control than Rowley. “American union leaders regard their Canadian branches as colonial dependencies,” he told one union convention. “Freedom is allowed as long as you don’t use it …. And it is an enormous lie that they spend more money in Canada than we send out ….The AFL/CIO is led by old men, wealthy, living in luxury, following politics that reflect the backward conservatism of American public life.”52 Speeches like this nearly created apoplexy in the CLC. On the other hand, even if the TWUA was unscrupulous about raiding and deferential to their New York office, Rowley’s characterization
of it as a mere company union, at the behest of capital, was not entirely fair, especially in the wake of their own recent struggles against injunctions, which came with jail time.

That struggles like Texpack had an impact on these nationalist debates can’t be doubted. Immediately after Texpack, the TWUA membership asked that their leaders address questions of Canadian autonomy and the American Director vowed to rectify problems such as the American domination of the TWUA newsletter. The leadership was clearly on the defensive. Within the TWUA, some younger members and staffers began pressing for more Canadian autonomy, especially in the selection of union leaders. UAW leader Dennis McDermott offered a revealing, if schizophrenic, example of internationals’ views on Canadian-based unions. Speaking to a January 1973 meeting of the Canadian UAW Council, he first denounced nationalists as anti-union “yahoos,” if not collaborators with business. He began with a litany of denunciations: Kent Rowley was a pawn of the liberals; Canadian unions were the handmaidens of reactionary business; the academic [nationalist] “lunatic” Left were “busy bodies and academics with nothing better to do” than criticize. Amazingly, his speech then shifted to a critique of American imperialism and the colonial manner in which internationals treated Canadian unions — as a “patronizing afterthought” — thus implicitly making the argument for the Canadian unions he had just denounced. Even within internationals, there existed an undercurrent of love-hate relations with American internationals, and signs of fissures in international connections.

Many Left nationalists saw Canadian unions as inherently more progressive, a view with some merit since some large CLC unions had become more bureaucratized, with anti-Left (Cold War) views ingrained in their character. Sadly, international leaders’ hostility to Canadian unions alienated them from some of their own activist members and marked a lost opportunity to be revitalized by new organizing. One of the disturbing elements of the TWUA campaign against the CTCU was its publication of pictures of picket line disturbances at Texpack, used to discredit the CTCU as wild and radical, with the TWUA posited as the wise, respectable alternative. Not only was the union reproducing a dominant press fascination with so-
called labour violence, but it was blaming the CTCU for the use of strikebreakers. The campaign bore some similarity to the more recent marginalization of militant groups like Ontario Coalition against Poverty by unions that have forgotten the role of civil disobedience in their own struggles for recognition. It was also deeply ironic that only 10 years later, the CLC would move towards a more nationalist politic while business raced headlong into continentalism. Although the CLC changed its view a few years after Texpack, small struggles like this one may have melted the ice of continental rigidities. Who is to say that the autoworkers who came to Brantford to defend the CTCU were not those who were quite happy later to see their own union establish its autonomy and support the CLC’s move towards economic nationalism?

The New Left, Gender, and Labour The Texpack strike is also entwined with the history of the Left, including the brief but significant flowering of the Waffle. Given the CLC’s attempts to isolate the CTCU, locating sympathetic political allies was an important strategy for union preservation. Waffle and CLM members were able to mobilize political networks beyond Brantford, and through the student movement, provide important pressure on the provincial government. Texpack was also pinpointed as important in Waffle debates about its own future, with some arguing that their intervention had been positive while others worried that a Waffle union strategy was faltering and that they had erroneously substituted themselves for workers on the Texpack line.

The presence of a New Left at Texpack, however, can be read in a positive light. In a struggle where not all strikers can put themselves in harm’s way, having committed picketers who will do this can be an important asset. As one former striker, who was very young at the time, recalled, she found the police “very scary” and actively avoided arrest for it would have disgraced her and her family. Wafflers and other Left groups obviously felt differently. Even taking on the OFL trade union leadership may have had longer term consequence, though it appeared in the short run to hasten the Waffle’s expulsion from the NDP. At the 1971 fall convention of the OFL, Wafflers tried to take the floor, condemning the TWUA’s raiding at Rexdale, only to
find their microphones turned off. This OFL response appeared rather hypocritical to some observers, and for some Leftists led, in the long run, to a rethinking of how to organize Left oppositions within unions.

In the history of the Canadian labour movement, Left and radical critiques from within the house of labour, even when defeated, can have a more general mobilizing and ideological effect. The Waffle’s participation in labour struggles symbolized a new generation who were not cowed by old anticommunist McCarthyist labels, and they existed in tandem with radical and rank-and-file workers who were also vocalizing a desire for change and increased militance. This renewed Left grated on the internationals’ nerves not just because of their nationalism, but also because of their appeals — made over the heads of the leadership — to the rank and file, criticizing accommodationist tactics and calling for more worker democracy and grassroots militancy — slogans all too reminiscent of old communist foes. (Indeed, to some there may have appeared a link between the two.) While some of the unionists who disobeyed international leaders and picketed at Texpack were later marginalized within their internationals, their politics did not leave their unions completely unchanged.

Although the national question dominated the strike, sidelining issues of feminism, the strike also highlighted the centrality of organizing women workers to any renewed labour movement activism, given the changing gender and ethnic composition of the workforce. Working women’s lives called out for a theory and praxis that addressed the interwoven impact of gender oppression and capitalist exploitation. For women strikers, management was the focus of all enmity in the heat of the battle, but they also returned to daily lives in which lower wages, the double day, the stresses of caring labour shaped a lived reality of gender and class subordination. The CTCU was particularly cognizant of the needs of women workers, including the recent immigrants often found in small, lower-wage textile plants. Not only were women unusually visible in the local union leadership, but the CTCU was willing in the early 1970s to take courageous stands on issues like abortion decriminalization which other unions avoided.

Our retrospective views of Texpack, shaped by 30 years of feminism, are more likely to emphasize the importance of women’s agency, as well as the
The mainstream press sometimes commented on women’s “unfemininely” loud, aggressive militance, but this shock might be accompanied by discomfort with their rough treatment by the police. One Brantford police officer offered his sexist (and perhaps ethnocentric) assessment that striking male workers from Massey Ferguson were much calmer than the volatile, violent Texpack women, a common stereotype of women easily becoming out of control. Of course, the stronger UAW local would likely not have had to face the frustrations of such egregious scabbing.\textsuperscript{59}

The president of the local, Ann Atfield, also claimed that one of the outcomes of the strike was an enhanced sense of solidarity among women workers. Before the strike, she said, many of the immigrant women tended to socialize with their own language group but the local became more unified and women developed a strong sense of their own importance in the union.\textsuperscript{60} Other former strikers also stressed a stronger sense of community fostered on the picket line and during the confrontations with police. Indeed, women became visible emblems of militancy during the strike, as photographers captured images of them being dragged by the hair, pushed into paddy wagons, escorted away from the line. When a train tried to move through the tracks onto Company property, Parent recalled, one Italian woman sat down on the tracks outside the plant as a protest, and refused to move until she was carried away (after her son, an Italian-speaking police officer, was also brought in to speak with her). Pictures of diminutive women strikers, with their curlers and kerchiefs, slacks and purses, facing lines of police men with visors and Billies, or later pictures of women dragged away by the hair, also created a sense of outrage among trade unionists. While male ambivalence, even antipathy towards women in the labour movement existed in some circumstances, there was also a lingering labour “chivalry” towards women, as well as a history of solidarity in the face of concerted attacks by employers and the state.

As in the political economy of the time, women were an “add on” issue rather than a key, integrated element of Left analysis. Yet, by the mid-1970s, the New Left shifted its politics, embracing a new emphasis on organizing women and a commitment to uniting feminism with socialism, and activists
now challenged the inertia of many large and international unions on feminist issues. Texpack was followed very soon by a number of better organized alliances between feminists and striking workers on the picket line, at Dare Cookies and Fleck Industries, as well as organizational innovation, as new feminist formations within unions, and also across unions, were established. While feminist issues were not at the centre of Texpack, sometimes the secondary or silenced questions can set the stage for the future, becoming the focus of new political formations.

**Conclusion**  Gender issues may have been understated in political discussions of Texpack, but in retrospect, we can see that the strike presaged important shifts within unions and the Left, as they soon initiated a more concerted analysis of the connections between women’s exploitation and oppression. The strike indicated the importance of unions integrating women into their ranks if they were to sustain themselves in the face of a changing workforce; it also highlighted the militancy that these new women workers might bring to union struggles. For some Left labour activists, Canadian unions — in contrast to larger, bureaucratized ones controlled from outside of the country — seemed to provide the best means of mobilizing marginalized women workers, the second tier of labour within the shaky Fordist accord. Further research needs to question if, and how, this drive for more Canadian autonomy had an impact on the labour movement’s ability to deal with questions of gender inequality, wage differentials, and feminist issues in the decades following Texpack.

The questions surrounding foreign ownership and international unions that assumed more prominence during the strike had long been bedevilling issues for the Canadian trade union movement, and they were never simply questions of cultural sentiment: nationalism had affected labour movement strategies, politics, and organizing in important ways. National control of the economy remains a prescient issue today in the face of debates about how to organize against the power of global capitalism, intent on stifling local and nation-state attempts to regulate social welfare, labour rights, and environmental protection. Was the CTCU effective at Texpack because it was a Canadian union? Yes and no. This was a small, grassroots-based union
committed to organizing the unorganized — especially women and immigrants — and was dedicated to ongoing labour education and militance in struggle. It saw the advantage in making union struggles political, and it recognized that other social issues deeply affected women workers. Its critique of bureaucracy, corruption, and imperialism, however, were expressions of ideology and politics, not just nationality.

The cautious business unionism and antipathy to socialism that the CTCU and the Waffle criticized has not always been the sole preserve of American-based internationals. Some all-Canadian unions embraced conservative strategies or played the nationalist card in order to rid themselves of radicals or communists, while some internationals tried to cling to democratic or radical politics. As Jerry Lembecke argues, internationalism can operate as both a “strategy and a principle” as the former, it has been used for conservative and anticommunist ends; as the latter, it has aided common struggles and the solidarity of working people across nations. What mattered for the CTCU, as it was later argued for the CAW, was the extent to which the union could encourage progressive alliances and foster participatory channels of action, thus aiding a sense of oppositional collective identity.

Given the economic trajectory of foreign ownership, not to mention a justified horror with the war in Vietnam, the political focus of Left nationalists on the American Empire in the early 1970s was understandable. Canadian antiwar and anticorporate feeling, as Mel Watkins noted, became wrapped up in a nationalist package. By the 1980s, this analysis of Canada as a colonial dependency was in question. Not only was the American working class profoundly injured by deindustrialization, but the “intensified internationalization of productive capital and the lightening mobility of financial capital” resulted in increased Canadian foreign direct investment in the United States. In some respects, this turn of events confirmed internationalist Left critics of the early 1970s, who suggested that a declining rate of profit was a global phenomenon and that the Left had to also examine the role of Canadian-based capital in perpetuating relations of domination across the globe. Warnings that Left nationalism could slide into liberalism were also made concrete, as Greg Albo shows, by the emergence of organizations like the Pro-Canada Network, which argued that the govern-
ments should be allowed to regulate foreign capital in order to maintain social programs that offer workers a modicum of dignity. This social democratic nationalism may be kinder and gentler than unchecked globalization, however it is highly statist in its solutions and avoids a full-fledged anticapitalist critique.\(^70\)

Nor is nationalism an appealing beacon for activists concerned with deconstructing the myth of the Canadian nation, critical of the racial and colonial oppressions of past nationalisms. The political concepts of nation and citizenship have also entailed exclusion and exploitation of differently empowered groups, particularly marginalized noncitizen workers.\(^71\)

Debates within the Left no longer pose stark alternatives of Left nationalism or socialist internationalism, though the relative significance of the American Empire within global capitalism and imperialism remains an issue of contention.\(^72\) While the structural and ideological context has altered, we do face some of the same strategic dilemmas encountered by organizers of the Texpack strike. When it comes to issues of policing and the courts, for instance, the CTCU’s history would suggest a two-sided strategy, incorporating both militant activism as well as a reformist political strategy focusing on the law and the state. Moreover, something more than a rhetorical commitment to social unionism might be in order, along with a recognition, rather than denunciations, of the contributions that Left, radical, and outsider perspectives have made to the labour movement. Untangling the complexities of a new imperial world, but organizing a working class still feeling local and identity-based ties may require the double vision that characterized radical antecedents in our union history: on one hand, allowing anticapitalist visions to flourish, while on the other, organizing directly to address the needs of local, unorganized, marginalized workers. While criticisms can be made of the political analysis of Left nationalist organizing over 30 years ago, its legacy also included an energetic militancy, a coherent commitment to a social(ist) transformation, and an optimistic political belief in the possibility of the working-class' ability to change the world. All those are worth remembering in our current struggles.
Notes

My thanks to the SPE reviewers for their comments, and to those people who shared their memories of Texpack, particularly John Lang, who also searched out old documents from his files. Special thanks go to Madeleine Parent for her memories, advice, and inspiration.


2. Statistics Canada, Census of Canada 3, Tables 7-1, 8-1, 7-11, 8-11 (1971).

3. The next largest groups were Germans 5%, Italians 4%, and Polish 3%. The Ontario workforce (and Brantford) was still predominantly white. Statistics Canada, Census of Canada Vol. 1 File 3 Table 5-1 (1971).


5. In 1970, Fortune designated AHS the “darling of Wall Street” and the country’s 14th fastest growing corporation. During the strike, the company claimed they were posting a loss in Brantford. CTC Bulletin (October 1971).


8. The TWUA was invited into Canada in 1946 by social democratic unionists impressed with its anticommunist politics (National Archives of Canada, Canadian Labour Congress Papers, Vol. 319, Files 9-13, 9-14, Rieve to Conroy, 13 June 1947). Led by an American, Sam Baron, the TWUA attempted to raid UTWA plants in battles characterized by factionalism, virulent red-baiting, and in some cases, violence. Baron’s private memo of 1950 claimed that removing Rowley and Parent “legally” had not been possible, and that the interunion struggle in Quebec was “difficult” due in part to the “extremely emotional and changeable” French rank and file. The AFL and CIO leaders in the United States clearly collaborated behind the scenes to find a way to remove Rowley and Parent. Baron’s reference to the involvement of a “third party” in Washington is interesting, since Parent believed that the security arm of the American state was involved. Ironically, the American UTWA leaders who ordered the dismissal were later indicted on charges of fraudulently misusing union funds. National Archives of Canada, Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union (TWUA), Accession 84 0013, Box 2, File 2-14, “History” Report of Sam Baron (7 June 1950).


11. Interview with L. and C., Brantford (23 November 2004). Locating former strikers proved to be difficult, despite an article on my work in the local newspaper and the aid of Laurel Ritchie. Two other former strikers communicated with me by email and telephone, but health problems prevented an in-person interview.

12. L. and C., interview.


14. L. and C., interview.


16. Sangster, “We No Longer Respect the Law.”


19. Interview with Ed Seymour (26 January 2005). Seymour was labelled a coward by a TWUA superior, Bud Clarke, for failing to criticize the CTCU in the meeting.


23. CTCU lawyers had a list of 63 people charged. The lawyers wrote to the Attorney General on 25 October 1971, attempting to have the charges withdrawn. Twelve charges were to be heard in Lambton Mills Court (flowing from Rexdale), the other 51 from Brantford. National Archives of Canada, Park Vol. 32, File 26.

24. Some Wafflers were interested in building a base in all unions, not just Canadian ones. Interview with John Lang (18 August 2003).

25. National Archives of Canada RCMP/CSIS Records, RG 146-3 Vol. 113, 200/000182, Waffle file. The early statements did not condemn the international unions as much as later ones, after the TWUA was involved in Rexdale.

26. The CLF’s platform was “anti-American imperialism, pro-socialist,” in favour of Canadian unions and an “85% quota” on Americans teaching in Canadian universities. Previous to Texpack, some CLF members participated in the CCU (with voice, no vote) as labour “club” members. McMaster University Archives, Canadian Liberation Front Papers (CLF) Box 6, F 18, Box 10, *New Canada* (September 1971).


28. L. and C., interview.

29. Ontario. Legislature of Ontario Debates (23 July 1971), pp. 4681, 4685. Constrained by NDP loyalty, he could not oppose the internationals and support the CTCU, and he blamed his electoral defeat in the fall of 1971 on the strike, which he claimed was “captured” by radical elements.

30. Archives of Ontario, RG 7-1 (2005) Copy of letter to Brantford Police Commission in Minister of Labour’s files from Local 27, UAW (28 October 1971). Within the government, some inquiries were made about the inordinate use of force by the police, though nothing came of them. See Archives of Ontario, Attorney General’s Files, RG 74-2, 510-5 Attorney General Allan Lawrence to Eric Silk, OPP Commissioner (30 August 1971).


32. National Archives of Canada, CLC, Vol. 432, File 131-13. A telegram from Ontario unions to Donald Macdonald, urging him to condemn the TWUA, included signatures from CUPE locals, some UAW locals, the Bricklayers, and Mine Mill.

33. When the CTCU was consumed with the Texpack strike, the TWUA raided another CTCU local of Harding Carpet in Collingwood, taking it over with a margin of merely three votes. National Archives of Canada, TWUA Papers Vol. 12, Texpack Files, “Confidential” letter from George Watson to all Ontario Staff (1 October 1971).

34. Seymour, interview.
35. In the process, Frank Park unearthed an old RCMP file full of erroneous “charges” against Rowley, left over from World War II, which he (successfully) demanded the government rescind.


39. McMaster University Archives, CLM Papers, Box 6, Jim Tester, CCU Executive Board Minutes (4–5 December 1971).

40. Interview with Madeleine Parent (18 August 2003).

41. Ibid.


45. The Globe and Mail (1 February 1971).


48. Panitch and Swartz, “Towards Permanent Exceptionalism”; High, “I’ll Wrap the F### Flag.”

49. Obviously, this correspondence is not a mechanical, instrumental one, and the state often claims status as a mediator between antagonistic interests, not only between capital and labour, but within those two groups. Christopher Tomlins, The State and Unions: Labor Relations, Law and the Organized Labor Movement in America, 1880–1960 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).


55. This was puzzling coming from a union that was recently on trial in the Ontario Supreme Court for disobeying injunctions. Only the irrational hatred of some TWUA leaders for the CTCU explains this.


60. Ibid.
62. By linking questions of women’s equality to broader issues such as militance, union democracy, and community alliances, Briskin and McDermott raise this question in Women Challenging Unions, but more research is still needed on the relationship between increased “Canadianization” of the union movement and labor's response to discrimination and equality issues.
64. Witness the earlier racist policies of the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Workers.