Local Government, the Standard Employment Relationship, and the Making of Ontario's Public Sector, 1945-1963

ABSTRACT:
This article examines the unionization of local government workers in Ontario during the 1940s and 1950s. While these workers played a central role in consolidating a Standard Employment Relationship (SER) across the public sector, the advancement of collective bargaining rights, regular hours of work, and uniform wages and benefits was fractured and spatially uneven. Bringing together theories of state formation with recent debates in labour geography, this article explores the politics of scale in the unionization of local government workers. Through the 1950s, it is argued that local government workers were able to effectively mount campaigns for recognition, develop shared bargaining capacities and establish federated labour organizations across the province, building from their embeddedness in a rapidly expanding metropolitan environment. Moreover, it is shown that the 'scaling up' of collective bargaining in this way provoked civic officials to establish new governance structures with the aim of containing the explosive growth of public sector unions. This entailed both the professionalization of labour relations practices and the development of more centralized administrative capacities. In this sense, it is argued that state formation through the 1950s and 1960s advanced through the efforts to normalize the demands of local government workers within a wider economy of service.

Keywords: Standard Employment Relationship, labour geographies, local government workers, state formation, politics of scale

Introduction

> Since the unions are already acting in concert, the municipalities cannot afford to do otherwise if they are to avoid being played off one against the other, as has happened since municipal employees became organized on a national basis. Close co-operation by the municipalities will do much in presenting a united front to the municipal unions and will help to preserve those few management rights which have not as yet been frittered away.[1]
> --George W. Noble, Personnel Officer, Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto, 1961

At the 1961 convention of the Canadian Federation of Mayors and Municipalities

(CFMM), civic officials took aim at labour relations as a growing problem faced by many

local government agencies. In the midst of an economic recession, they were concerned

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[1] Noble, George W. 1961. "Municipal Personnel Problems in the Larger Canadian Municipalities", in Conference Proceedings, May 31, 1961, *Canadian Federation of Mayors and Municipalities*, Halifax, Nova Scotia.

with cutting costs, raising revenues and keeping wages down.[2] However, the rapid expansion of labour unions in municipalities across the country made this difficult, especially in smaller communities, which lacked the experience or administrative capacity to effectively counter worker demands. George W. Noble, the Personnel Officer for the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto, was especially concerned, warning of the increasing coordination of civic, electrical, and public utilities workers who were now meeting on an annual basis, drafting common language and establishing bargaining patterns on a regional, provincial, and national scale. In this context, he argued that the municipalities could no longer afford to go it alone.

Through the 1940s and 1950s, local government workers in Ontario and across Canada formed public sector labour federations and developed shared capacities for bargaining, research, and mobilization that quickly eclipsed the discretionary power of civic officials in smaller municipalities. Through their organizing efforts, these workers provoked the formation of increasingly standardized personnel practices and new modes of governance across state agencies. However, while their struggles posed a central problem for civic officials through this period, they have often been overlooked in Canadian labour history, political geography and urban studies. The aim of this article is to recover this history, exploring the role of local government workers in consolidating a Standard Employment Relationship (SER) across Ontario's public sector.

Drawing from labour geography and theories of state formation, I examine the dynamic relationship between urban governance and collective bargaining through this

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[2] Municipalities in Canada were negatively affected by a global economic downturn, which began in 1957 and would last until around 1962. Rising unemployment and growing demand for services in a context of rapid urbanization meant that municipal governments were increasingly strapped for cash. Curtailing the growing power of the unions became a central part of cost-cutting strategies that was undertaken nationally through the CFMM.

time. Examining the fractured and uneven geographies of local government employment, I interrogate accounts of post-war state formation that emphasize a tendency towards state centralization. Very often, political geographers have focused on the emergence of uniform and expansive public services, which were increasingly brought under the federal and provincial jurisdiction through this period (Jenson, 1989; Martin, 1989; Bradford, 2002; Jessop, 2002; Brenner, 2004). The study of local government workers calls into question the degree of coordination that was achieved between state agencies, exposing the *uneven* geographies of state power in Ontario. Far from a unified and coherent structure, my research highlights how the state system was fractured and dispersed, culminating in struggles that were unevenly embedded in distinctive political and economic milieus.

I also contribute to ongoing debates in labour geography on the politics of scale in collective bargaining. Recent studies have recognized the significance of spatial scale in the negotiation of employment contracts, highlighting how working class people "have a vested interest in trying to ensure that the geography of capitalism is produced in certain ways and not in others" (Herod, 2001: 2). Along these lines, numerous studies have explored the politics of 'scaling up,' as labour organizations have moved from site-specific bargaining towards sectoral-level structures. While some scholars have argued that workers have been able to effectively gain leverage through 'jumping scales,' others point out that moving to more centralized structures can render bargaining inflexible and undemocratic, leaving little room to move at the local level (Holmes, 2004; Rutherford and Holmes, 2007; Rutherford, 2013; Sweeney, 2013).

Looking at the struggles of local government workers in south-central Ontario, this article explores the dynamic relationship between collective bargaining and post-war state formation. Beyond viewing the state as a territorial container encompassing employment relations, it highlights the challenge faced by civic officials in establishing uniform and coherent personnel relations practices *across* municipal jurisdictions. In the context of metropolitan expansion, it is argued that the limited capacities of state agencies to overcode the bargaining process created opportunities for local government workers to establish new modes of organization, shifting the locus of authority away from local notables in making demands for recognition, increased wages and employment standards. At the same time, I highlight how these struggles provoked civic officials to create more centralized and professionalized personnel relations practices that effectively bound together a labour market across the 'public sector' as a singular domain. In this sense, I argue that state formation through the 1950s and 1960s advanced through the efforts of civic officials to contain and normalize the demands of local government workers within a wider economy of service.

Extending a Standard Employment Relationship to the Public Sector

Political economists have often noted the emergence of a Standard Employment Relationship (SER) in core sectors of advanced industrialized economies through the 1950s and 1960s (Butchtemann and Quack, 1990; Muckenberger, 1989; Tilly, 1996; Fudge and Vosko, 2003; Bosch, 2004). The SER refers to a kind of labour that came to be recognized as 'normal,' defining conventional understandings of work during the 'golden age' of Fordist production. According to Fudge and Vosko (2001: 273), this

entailed the establishment of "a continuous, full-time employment relationship where the worker has one employer and normally works on the employer's premises or under his or her supervision". By the early 1960s, it came to be recognized as normal in Canada for male breadwinners to work 40 hours a week, Monday through Friday, under a stable employer at a worksite that was separated from the home. In addition, certain social benefits and entitlements came to be considered part of a 'social wage', including unemployment insurance, public pensions and a degree of welfare provided for families through social services and state-provided allowances.

The rise of a Standard Employment Relationship is often attributed to the relative strength of organized labour at the time. In a context of rapid economic growth and industrialization in the wake of the Second World War, labour unions in Ontario were able to push for greater recognition under the law and negotiate contracts with employers that provided for a higher standard of living (Russell, 1990; Fudge and Tucker; 2001; McInnis, 2002; Fudge and Vosko, 2003). This was facilitated to a degree under federal and provincial legislation modeled on the American *Wagner Act*, in which 'responsible' unions were granted recognition under the law through a certification process by union membership cards and majority vote (Fudge and Tucker, 2001). Recognized as exclusive bargaining agents, unions were able to negotiate the conditions of their employment – to demand wage increases through collective bargaining and file grievances through the arbitration process. And they were granted the power to defend workers against unfair labour practices and enforce obligations on employers to bargain in good faith (O'Grady, 1992).

The struggles of industrial workers in Ontario for a Standard Employment Relationship through the post-war period have been well documented (Palmer; 1983; Morton, 1984; Heron, 1996). With the rapid expansion of the manufacturing sector across the province, the rate of union membership growth nearly doubled the Canadian average through this time, and by 1962, union density in the province was second only to British Columbia at 32.7 percent (Rose, 2003). Moreover, in the face of recalcitrant employers, unionization efforts were often furthered by lengthy and protracted strikes through this time, representing "major 'tests of strength' … in industries in which, for the most part, unionism and collective bargaining on a significant scale were relatively new and unfamiliar phenomena" (Jamieson, 1968: 301-302). Militant actions such as the 1945 Ford strike in Windsor are often identified as key moments in the entrenchment of union security and the extension of industrial unionism across the province.

However, while workers made significant gains in core economic sectors, the extension of a Standard Employment Relationship remained extremely uneven and limited to a specific section of the workforce. By the 1950s, Heron (1996: 83) notes, "the typical union member was a relatively settled, semi-skilled male worker within a large industrial corporation". Beyond the manufacturing, resources, and transportation sectors, the reach of the Standard Employment Relationship remained quite limited, hampered by the inward focus of the larger industrial unions and restrictive labour legislation that delimited the bargaining unit as an individual worksite. Fudge and Vosko (2001) argue that this contributed to a segmented labour market -– as non-standard forms of employment continued to proliferate in the service sector and white-collar professions, especially in those areas dominated by women.

However, while a number of studies have highlighted the uneven extension of the SER to different sections of the Canadian economy, few studies have documented the rise of a Standard Employment Relationship in the public sector. Those that do have tended to emphasize union militancy at the federal and provincial levels (for example, see Palmer, 1983; Morton, 1984; Heron, 1996). Often they date the recognition of bargaining rights for public sector workers to 1965 – when the postal worker went on strike – or 1967, when federal workers were granted collective bargaining rights under the *Public Service Staff Relations Act.* Such studies only briefly touch on the unionization of local government workers who would, to a large degree, lay the foundations for the unionization efforts at the provincial and federal levels.

This article examines the struggle for a Standard Employment Relationship in Ontario's local government sector. Drawing from archival materials taken from the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), the Canadian Federation of Mayors and Municipalities (CFMM) and the City of Toronto, I show how, beginning in the mid-1940s, workers in municipalities, public utilities, hospitals and schools came together in federated labour organizations in order to negotiate wages and benefits, establish regular hours, and advance standardized procedures for hiring and advancement. Challenging the discretion of civic officials, workers coordinated their activities, developing more centralized structures that enabled them to share information across regions and develop common bargaining strategies. Through such structures, these workers aspired for 'industrial citizenship,' demanding recognition in collective bargaining relationships with city governments across Ontario.

Beyond providing a historical case study of a largely ignored segment of the working class, this article contributes to scholarly discussions on state formation and its relationship to changing labour geographies. Recent studies have identified this as a ciritical 'blind spot' in the literature, as there has been a tendency to focus on the state as a *regulator* of labour relations rather than as an employer in its own right (Castree, 2007; Jordhus-Lier, 2012; Sweeney, 2013). Consequently, there has been a neglect to consider how the labour process operates *within* state agencies, or how workers are able to negotiate the boundaries of state power through collective bargaining. Examining the struggles of local government workers through the 1940s and 1950s provides a means of putting labour geography and state formation into conversation, examining how workers were able to skillfully challenge established governance structures and contribute to the formation of new constellations of state power.

The literature on post-war state formation very often portrays the 1950s and 1960s as a time of state centralization. Through this period, Bradford (2000: 17) notes that urban problems "were effectively redefined as subsets of national ones, and therefore amenable to solutions designed centrally." Brenner (2004) has characterized this as a period of 'spatial Keynesianism' or 'national-developmentalism,' which entailed state projects aimed at establishing uniform and integrated administrative systems across national territories. The emergence of large scale and extensive infrastructural networks, it is argued, demanded the expansion of regional planning capacities and the consolidation of governance structures through which essential services – such as roads, sewers, water supply and parklands – could be coordinated between jurisdictions.

Far from a unified and coherent structure, a study of unionization by local government workers highlights how fractured and dispersed the state system really was through this time. Rather than viewing state agencies as *encompassing* space, my study points to the challenges faced by civic officials in coordinating services across a sprawling metropolitan landscape. Through the 1940s and 1950s, I demonstrate that labour relations were often entrapped in specific places, under the jurisdiction of local authorities who had limited contact with one another. Indeed, it was only through micro-struggles occurring at a number of different sites and scales that more centralized structures came to be knotted together.

Moreover, my study contributes to discussions in labour geography on the politics of scale in collective bargaining. Following from Herod (2001: 46), recent literature has demonstrated how workers and unions "*actively produce economic spaces and scales* in particular ways" – building power through the embeddedness of their labour at specific worksites, and their capacity to frame the scale at which employment relations are negotiated (Herod, 2001: 46). Recently, there have been debates in the labour geographies literature on the efficacy of 'jumping scales' as a strategy for collective bargaining. While negotiating contracts across a wider territory can give workers a degree of leverage at times, scholars have argued that this power is 'constrained' through the persistence of asymmetrical power relations (Coe and Jordhus-Lier, 2011). For instance, in his study of the Hospital Employees' Union (HEU) in British Columbia, Rutherford (2013) notes, 'scaling up' is not always good for labour. In fact, organizing struggle at the national or regional level can involve operating through centralized, bureaucratic and highly legalistic administrative channels, which may contribute to the

demobilization of struggles at other scales. What matters, then, is whether such scalings "create opportunities for a variety of different site-scalar strategic actions" (Jonas, 2006: 404).

In my research, I examine how civic officials and local government workers struggled to redefine the parameters of the employment contract through the post-war period and how this shaped the dynamics of state formation. Through the 1950s and 1960s, I argue that the limited capacities of state agencies to overcode the bargaining process created opportunities for local government workers to make demands for a Standard Employment Relationship building from their embeddedness in densely settled urban environments while at the same time shifting the locus of authority away from local notables. Through developing connective bargaining strategies that built from closely coordinated unions in the dense metropolitan regions, I argue that federated public sector unions were effectively able to 'jump scales', advancing demands for union recognition and standard employment relations in cities and town across the province (Smith, 1992). However, I note that the legacies of 'scaling up' have been ambivalent. In confronting the growing power of public sector labour federations, I argue that civic official moved in the mid-1960s to develop more centralized and professionalized personnel relations structures, which established 'distance' in the bargaining process, through effectively removed collective bargaining from the political realm and generating new capacities to investigate, enumerate and compare the provisions of services across jurisdictions.

Second Wave Urbanism, State Formation and Labour Relations in the Metropolitan Region

Far from a uniform and integrated public sector, a tangled web of public services proliferated in the 1940s and 1950s across unclear and highly contested jurisdictions. Problems in the administration of services were only exacerbated with rapid urbanization and the emergence of sprawling metropolitan regions as existing municipal governance structures were stretched to the limit (Ross, 2005). With a rapidly expanding labour force responsible for the provision of a wide range of services across an expansive urban and suburban landscape, administrative structures inherited from early twentieth century civic reformers were quickly coming apart.

The literature on post-war state formation in Canada often tends to overlook the degree of institutional fragmentation through this period to the extent that it places emphasis on processes of state centralization. Scholars have focused on how state agencies were able to achieve a 'spatial fix' through the establishment of uniform and integrated administrative capacities (Brenner, 2004). Moreover, with the establishment of national and provincial development policies, there has been a tendency to stress the role of 'higher' levels of government in regulating the accumulation of capital. For instance, Jenson (1989) describes how the post-war compromise in Canada hinged around a program of nation-building, in which brokerage relationships were established with the aim of establishing administrative uniformity across the federal, provincial, and municipal jurisdictions.

In the urban context, studies have highlighted the emergence of new programmes for metropolitan governance, effectively entrenching processes of capital accumulation at

wider spatial scales (Soja, 1989; Donald, 2002; Brenner, 2004; Harvey, 2008). Through redistributing resources from the downtown core, civic officials were able to finance the ongoing expansion of physical infrastructure in the economic hinterland. In the process, they established administrative structures that enabled the coordination of services across jurisdictions. In this sense, Soja (1989: 182) describes the post-war metropolitan region as a 'state-managed urban system,' in which governments played a central role in "organizing production and reproduction and regulating the conflicts and struggles arising from these relations".

Building from this perspective, it is often argued that Canadian cities were able to avoid the post-war urban crisis experienced in the United States to the extent that they developed state structures regulating development at the level of the metropolitan region. Amalgamating in 1953, Toronto has often been viewed as one of the first major North American experiments in metropolitan governance (Magnusson, 1981; Isin and Wolfson, 1998; Frisken, 2007). Donald (2002) highlights the importance of Metro Toronto as a regional 'mode of regulation' that facilitated state accumulation strategies through this period. By developing regional governance structures, Donald argues that Toronto seemed to have "successfully minimized many of the contradictions inherent in economic development through the elaboration of a set of important institutional fixes, including the creation of a certain discourse around the 'city that works'" (196).

However, while state agencies aspired to a degree of administrative uniformity, it is also important to note the tendencies towards increasing urban political fragmentation through this period, especially in the context of a growing municipal workforce. In the midst of 'expansive metropolitanization,' political jurisdictions were often stretched and

fragmented, contributing to a complex dynamic of struggle through this period (Soja, 1989: 181). This was especially apparent in Ontario, which very quickly became the most densely urbanized and industrialized province in Canada. By the early 1970s, sixty percent of Ontario's population came to live in cities over 50,000, and nearly three quarters in cities over 10,000 (Feldman, 1974). Population growth was largely concentrated in the heavily industrialized south-central region of the province, which became firmly established as the manufacturing hub for the national economy (Spelt, 1972; Lemon, 1985). With a rapidly increasing birth rate and an influx of new immigrants, the metropolitan region expanded from a population of 942,762 to 1,172,556 between 1945 and 1953.

The growing population not only reflected a demographic shift; it was also indicative of new ways of living that confounded established urban governance structures. By 1943, the City of Toronto's master plan noted, "the political boundaries of the City bear no relation to the social and economic life of its people" (cited in Colton, 1980: 59). Suburbanization brought settlement on the outskirts based on the construction of low-density, detached, single-family dwellings (Harris, 1996). The establishment of an extensive network of highways and large-scale infrastructure projects, Harvey (2008: 27) notes, contributed to "the total re-engineering of not just the city but also the whole metropolitan region". In this context, civic officials identified the rescaling of services for an interlocking network of communities as a major problem of urban governance (for example see Smallwood, 1963).

In seeking to maintain the pace of urban growth, in the late 1940s and early 1950s municipal governments often undertook massive public expenditures to meet increased

demand for services – including sewers, water mains, roads, and power lines – connecting the Central Business District to the growing suburban satellite communities. In confronting the expansive scale of service provision, governments faced the problem of maintaining a degree of uniformity across metropolitan regions.[3] Through this period, we see the rapid expansion of municipal services, including hospitals, libraries, recreational facilities, police and fire services, and clerical and administrative staff. However, municipal governments lacked the capacity to administer the growing labour force, which was dispersed across largely uncoordinated departments and arms-length commissions.

Moreover, municipal services became increasingly entangled with 'higher' levels of government, as they were taken under federal and provincial jurisdiction either directly or through arm's length commissions. This led to the fragmentation of public service work, which was taken under the wings of a wide array of different state agencies, each responsible for determining wages and working conditions for a specific set of workers – inside and outside employees, public utility and public transportation workers, police officers and firefighters, librarians and school janitors. Very often, work in these different agencies remained isolated and relatively autonomous as officials had not yet developed the capacity to generate comprehensive knowledge across jurisdictions.

The quick expansion of services across regions and their parcelization within fractured jurisdictions contributed to a breakdown in labour discipline by the early 1960s. As Ross (2005: 161) notes in her history of public sector unionization in Canada through

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[3] The demand to establish uniform services across the region becomes especially apparent in the 1965 *Report of the Royal Commission on Metropolitan Ontario*. The Royal Commission, established by the Ontario provincial government under the chairmanship of H. Carl Goldenberg, compared the degree to which services were evenly spread across the region, looking at everything from roads and highways, to sewage and garbage disposal, school and hospitals.

this time, "the ongoing growth in state functions and hence employees attenuated direct contact between the employer and employees. In other words, supervisors could no longer rely on interpersonal relations to ensure discipline, and new managerial methods were required".

This was reflected in terms of the sheer logistics of organizing work across a rapidly expanding region, which posed a significant problem for civic officials in south-central Ontario. By the early 1960s, Metro Toronto's Personnel Officer, George B. Noble (1961: 4) noted, "our employees are scattered over an area of some 240 square miles and we find it extremely difficult to maintain the standard of communication between the employer and employees which is desired". As expansive infrastructural networks came to stretch across the urban landscape, the highly paternalistic structure of municipal governance increasingly broke down. Hence, Noble argues that simply holding supervisors meetings, providing in-service training for specific jobs and distributing personnel bulletins on the bulletin boards were no longer adequate. As municipal work could no longer be "centrally housed", the standard of communication had "notably deteriorated" (4).

With the proliferation of services across rapidly expanding metropolitan regions, it became increasingly difficult for civic officials to maintain control. They lacked the capacity to compare labour across jurisdictions and increasingly came into conflict as they attempted to set down norms in overlapping territories. In this fractured milieu, workers achieved a degree of leverage. Building from modalities of industrial citizenship taken from the manufacturing sector, they were able to reimagine their labour in ways that confounded their management under the patronage of civic authorities and advance

claims to membership in a public sector that was governed by standards held at a distance from direct political intervention.

Negotiating Employment Standards: The Politics of Scale in the Local Government Sector

Studies of public sector labour relations often begin from a neo-institutionalist perspective that emphasizes the relationship between two key actors: workers and the state (Warskett, 1997). In accounting for the rapid unionization of state workers during the 1960s, structural factors are emphasized, such as the rapid expansion of government programs under the auspices of Keynesian demand management strategies (O'Connor, 1972; Armstrong, 1977). There is a focus on policy changes – as state agencies struggled to stay consistent with the norms set down in the manufacturing sector (Hodgetts, 1973). Or there is an emphasis on the growing militancy of the workers themselves, who rose up in the mid-1960s and forced state agencies to accede to their demands (Heron, 1996; Palmer, 1983). The organization of local government workers through the 1940s and 1950s opens up a different perspective, exposing the *uneven* patterns of unionization that took shape through this period. It highlights how struggles to unionize workers as a part of the 'public sector' were rooted in specific places, with their own political and economic legacies (Painter, 1991).

The uneven geographies of public sector unionization were especially apparent in Ontario. While governments in other provinces across Canada had included local government workers under private sector labour relations legislation, and consequently established a relatively uniform statutory 'playing field' for collective bargaining, the

Conservative provincial government in Ontario under the leadership of Leslie Frost had appeased the concerns of civic officials in the smaller municipalities by deliberately excluding city workers from the *Labour Relations Act* (1948). Throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, municipal governments were required to pass city by-laws in order to have their workers covered by the Act. In this context, union recognition advanced unevenly across fragmented and largely uncoordinated municipal jurisdictions.

Far from blanket recognition, industrial relations experts noted that the capacity of a municipality to withhold recognition of a municipal union was "a function of its strength relative to that of its employees" (Frankel and Pratt, 1954). The diverse patchwork of rules regulating local government workers speaks to the absence of a coherent framework for managing labour relations across the local government sector at this time. Civic, electrical and public utility workers were embedded in specific political and economic locations, building local and extra-local alliances with other organized workers, industrial relations specialists, and political leaders in making claims to recognition.

The movement to unionize the entire municipal and utility sector in Ontario built from industrial unions that were emerging in the metropolitan regions. While these unions were individually affiliated to labour federations prior to the Second World War, remaining largely independent, uncoordinated, and only loosely connected by a small cadre of local officials, they increasingly came together in aspiring toward new scales of union organization through the 1950s and 1960s (Logan, 1948: 294). They built from dense networks in the rapidly expanding metropolitan regions – such as Vancouver,

Winnipeg and Toronto – where a wide array of public services proliferated through processes of suburbanization and industrial development.

It was not sufficient to simply organize for improved wages and working conditions at a municipal level. Through this period, increasingly coordinated unions in metropolitan areas sought to 'jump' scales, organizing themselves over a wider geographical field. Hence, labour activists attempted to establish 'general' federations of public sector workers on a regional and national level. This is reflected, for instance, in the decision of the Canadian Electrical Union (CEU) to expand its mandate, changing its name to the National Organization of Civic, Utility, and Electrical Workers (NOCUEW) in 1944. While NOCUEW had national ambitions, it was initially restricted to south-central Ontario and clustered around civic hydro-electrical workers affiliated with the Canadian Congress of Labour (CCL).

A haven for blue-collar and predominantly male public utilities workers, the CCL advocated an industrial unionism that sought to organize workers in more centralized, sectoral administrative structures. Drawing from this approach, NOCUEW built connections across municipal services, first through gas workers and electricians involved in other local government agencies and then through organizing civic workers more broadly. Unionization proceeded quickly with the formation of eleven branches in south-central Ontario. [4] Within each branch, workers struggled to extend their organization to include workers in other municipal services and in surrounding communities. This was most effective in and around the Toronto area, from which the bulk of the national union's executive would be recruited.

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[4] Toronto, Sault Ste Marie, London, Hamilton, Sudbury, Guelph, New Toronto and Mimico, Etobicoke, North York

Until 1954, NOCUEW had few rivals in unionizing local government workers across the province. While directly chartered municipal unions continued to maintain their independence, adhering to a tradition of craft unionism that emphasized local autonomy,[5] the electrical workers managed to quickly make in-roads at first with other electrical workers working for different municipal agencies such as the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC). Moreover, connections were made with workers from surrounding municipalities and townships. Through connective bargaining strategies linking together workers in different regions and industrial sectors, the membership of NOCUEW grew rapidly across the province from 2,273 in 1951 to over 29,000 by 1961, and 39,901 in 1963 following its merger with the National Union of Public Employees (NUPE).[6]

However, organizing efforts proceeded unevenly. The male-dominated 'outside' workers, who maintained closer connections to blue collar industrial unions, tended to join together more quickly through the 1950s than the 'inside' administrative staff. This was reflected in the gender composition of labour federations, with the membership (and executive) being male-dominated until the mid-1960s.[7] Moreover, while unions were established in many large- and medium-sized cities across south-central Ontario by the end of the 1940s, it was much more difficult to make inroads in smaller towns, rural areas and the budding suburbs in the less industrialized parts of the province, which often remained bastions for the city fathers, made up of local notables and business leaders

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[5] In the immediate postwar period, there were some eighty civic employees directly chartered in this way under the Trades and Labour Congress (TLC) and nineteen under the Canadian Congress of Labour (CCL) (Logan, 1948: 294).

[6] Based on the annual *Report on Labour Organization in Canada* published by the federal Department of Labour (Ottawa: Edmond Cloutier) for 1951 and 1961.

[7] In 1965, 12,521 women were listed as members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) in Ontario out of a total membership of 38,901 (CUPE was formed from the merger of NUPE and NUPSE in 1963). See the *Annual report of the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce under the Corporations and Labour Unions Returns Act* (1965).

who challenged efforts to extend industrial citizenship to government workers (Plunkett, 1973).

The union correspondence of the period highlights the resistance faced by union organizers in pursuing certification in smaller towns and villages. For instance, at Branch 15 in Brockville, the city council refused to meet with the union altogether. "It appeared that the Chairman of the Works Committee, a local Construction Contractor, did not favour dealing with trade unionists, and he seemed to be boss of the Municipality, and would not agree to meet our committee".[8] In confronting the resistance of civic officials to unionization efforts, labour activists often undertook public relations campaigns, issuing press releases and drawing support from labour-friendly aldermen in effectively pressuring the city council to recognize the union.

Some civic officials regarded the extension of 'industrial citizenship' to the municipal sector as a *political* act, rather than as neutral machinery designed to ensure the smooth functioning of labour relations as unions and their allies had claimed. At Branch 13 in Belleville, it was reported that "some members of the City Council or City officials got peculiar ideas about our Organization and hindered negotiations from progressing".[9] Given their affiliation with the Canadian Congress of Labour, it was thought that NOCUEW had a 'red tinge' and supported the left-progressive Canadian Commonwealth Federation (CCF). As in several other municipalities, the city fathers attempted to get around the union by establishing their own employees' association, dominated by workers 'loyal' to the civic administration.

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[8]Library and Archives of Canada. MG 28 I234, Vol. 1. CUPE National Fonds. National Organization of Civic, Utility and Electrical Workers. 1-5. NOCUEW Bulletins, 1949. Bulletin #12. 7 April 1949.
[9] *Library and Archives of Canada. MG 28 I234, Vol. 1. CUPE National Fonds. National Organization of Civic, Utility and Electrical Workers. 1-5. NOCUEW Bulletins, 1949. Bulletin #12. 7 April 1949.*

Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, unions remained entangled in a complex web of personal and political loyalties through which they sought to establish union recognition and advance collective bargaining. Very often, municipal leaders would recruit personnel officers from the ranks of the union officialdom in seeking to contain the demands of labour activists. For instance, Albert Barnetson, president of Toronto Hydro local 1 since 1923 and the first president of NOCUEW, was recruited to be Assistant to the Personnel Director of Toronto Hydro in 1949, while at the same time remaining active in union politics. In his correspondence, NOCUEW Secretary Treasurer T.F. Stevenson bitterly noted that Barnetson used his position "to make everything as difficult as possible for myself in attempting to get justice for the Toronto Membership employed by the Hydro".[10]

However, with the growing reach of union organization, such a paternalistic style came to be viewed as old-fashioned and overly restrictive. By the early 1950s, a 'public employee' identity was increasingly operationalized through the development of a more uniform, centralized and bureaucratic style of organization. The union bulletins were printed more regularly, though they lacked Stevenson's more personal flair; the language of 'slavery' and 'state bondage' gave way to a more professional language of 'service' and professional commitment. By the end of the 1940s, a Director of Organization was appointed which Ross (2005: 186) sees as evidence that NOCUEW had "clearly stepped on the road of professionalization and bureaucratization of leadership". The new Secretary-Treasurer, Stan Little, led the push to expand the union's self-definition, renaming the organization as the National Union of Public Service Employees (NUPSE)

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[10] Library and Archives of Canada. MG 28 I234, Vol. 1. CUPE National Fonds. National Organization of Civic, Utility and Electrical Workers. I-7. NOCUEW Bulletins, 1951. Bulletin #25. 8 May 1951.

in 1952. Little would reorient the unions organizing efforts, from a model of industrial unionism, in which workers were divided according to distinct 'sectors', to a form of general unionism, which aimed to organize all workers in the public services.

Through the growing administrative capacities of provincial and national federations, collective bargaining was transformed from a parochial affair between local notables and local union leaders. In consolidating national federated structures, workers could draw on increasingly professionalized networks in coordinating their demands in collective bargaining between different municipalities. As early as 1947, joint meetings were held between union representatives from Mimico, New Toronto, Etobicoke, York, Forest Hill, North York and Toronto to discuss establishing a uniform wage rate schedule for the Toronto district. Coordinated bargaining strategies were taken up in the metropolitan regions would then provide the benchmark for union recognition and collective bargaining in the smaller municipalities, townships and suburbs, where unions faced municipalities that had no 'specialized personnel men' in dealing with negotiations. A NUPE (1960) report describes the bargaining situation in many municipalities through the 1940s and 1950s:

> Labour relations were in most cases handled by management people who had other full time duties and more or less attended to negotiations and personnel matters in their spare time. In contrast with this, the local unions had a distinct advantage in being affiliated on the provincial and national levels. They had information on the rates of pay and conditions of work in other municipalities, hospitals and school boards. They were well prepared for negotiations and they were well organized. They had the co-operation and assistance of other unions in the district while the management side was without any effective form of organization. Management was divided and the staff was organized so that they could play one employer against the other. In addition they were helped by the general trend towards progressive wage increases being obtained by other types of workers.[11]

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[11] Library and Archives of Canada. MG 28 I234, Vol. 3. CUPE National Fonds. National Union of Public Employees. NUPE. *Highlights*, May 1957-Oct 1960. July 1960.

It was at the 1961 convention that George W. Noble (1961), the Personnel Officer for Metropolitan Toronto, warned of the increasing coordination of municipal employees, who met on a regular basis, establishing bargaining patterns on a regional, provincial and national scale. It was no longer sufficient to leave negotiations to city council, as unions recruited lawyers, labour economists and other paid officials widely experienced in the negotiation of collective agreements.

> Their requests are well supported by statistics on wages and working conditions covering, not only comparable municipalities, but also wages and working conditions in industry in the area. The municipal official representing the Corporation, or acting as the chief advisor to the Committee doing the negotiating, frequently does not possess, nor can he readily obtain current information on comparable wages and working conditions in the various municipalities cited by the union.

By imagining themselves as a part of wider public sector, workers were able to separate themselves from parochial municipal structures and achieve a degree of distance in their negotiations for recognition and improved working conditions. Beyond simply negotiating with civic officials at the municipal level, they fashioned themselves as a part of a wider public sector that cut across local government agencies, drawing together comparisons between workers that had previously incomparable. Increasingly, those working for hospital and school boards, transit and hydroelectric commissions, municipal and regional governments came to enter the same field of comparisons. Through their increasing coordination within provincial federations, they were able to effectively 'jump' scales, extending norms established in metropolitan regions to local government agencies across the province.

The Rise of Personnel Relations Strategies: Formatting a Public Sector Labour Market

By the early 1960s, the emergent public sector federations had to some degree destabilized labour relations in local government agencies, leading civic officials to seek out new methods for achieving labour discipline. It was insufficient to simply leave negotiations to the discretion of locally elected politicians. Increasingly, civic officials problematized a fragmented and *ad hoc* approach to collective bargaining and labour relations. As unions in the municipal sector had become well-established by the 1950s, they sought to coordinate with one another and build a cadre of personnel relations professionals that could undertake negotiations on a local level (Frankel and Pratt, 1954). Through the disciplines of industrial relations and labour economics, they began to explore ways of confronting and curtailing union bargaining strategies, which had led to 'unjustifiably generous' agreements.

While an 'old guard' would seek to maintain its discretionary power as representatives of civic order, management professionals and department administrators increasingly came to accept collective bargaining as a regular part of the labour relations process. Rather than simply fighting union certification campaigns, they focused instead on *adapting* the bargaining process to the municipal sector. The problem for civic officials and industrial relations specialists was how to subsume trade unions under a wider economy of service that ensured that workers would not 'take advantage' of their strategic location in extorting 'unfair' increases from local officials.

The push to counter increasing union coordination was initially advanced in the larger metropolitan areas. In fact, this was an important factor prompting amalgamation of the City of Toronto with its surrounding municipalities in 1954. Immediately following the establishment of the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto, Chairman Fred

Gardiner called for increased co-operation between the personnel officers of the thirteen Metro municipalities and called for Metro itself to strive toward collective bargaining on a united front. This was often framed as a problem of achieving 'distance' in the negotiations by removing them from council chambers. The aim here was, in part, to depoliticize the process, seeking to delink bargaining from municipal elections and to develop a "uniform policy and a master plan for negotiations prepared and implemented by experts in statistics and negotiations."[12]

However, civic officials recognized that it was not enough to simply coordinate on a metropolitan scale. In order to normalize the field of municipal collective bargaining, it was also necessary to develop a centralized hub for the collection of information and to establish a system of comparisons that would draw from municipalities across the province, and ultimately across the country. Hence, in the spring of 1953, the Canadian Federation of Mayors and Municipalities (CFMM) approached the Industrial Relations Centre at McGill University with the idea of undertaking a study on labour relations across Canadian municipalities. While the researchers accepted the general principles of industrial citizenship, admitting that collective bargaining in the municipal sector was 'inevitable,' they argued that these principles should be carefully adapted to the specific context of the 'public service'. Municipal workers were distinctive, it was argued, because their wages were not tied to the sale of commodities; rather, they were paid with tax money. Moreover, they often provided essential services that could not be easily discontinued, which rendered municipal governments vulnerable in the event of a strike.

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[12] Library and Archives of Canada. MG 28 I234, Vol. 3. CUPE National Fonds. National Union of Public Employees. NUPE. *Highlights*, May 1957-Oct 1960. October 1960.

Nevertheless, it was argued that "pressures towards economy exist which will serve, in bargaining, to check, and force into compromise, the demands of labour" (Frankel and Pratt, 1954: 11). It was the task of industrial relations specialists through the 1950s and 1960s to establish a model aimed at achieving such economy in the municipal and utilities sector (now taken as a singular domain), establishing practices that facilitated the normalization of the collective bargaining process. In order to stabilize labour relations and render them more predictable, industrial relations specialists developed management techniques that would effectively insulate the collective bargaining process from political forces within the municipality. This meant shifting bargaining from city council, where allies of business and labour would often line up against one another in proclaiming their political loyalties. This, it was argued, was problematic in areas where city council was dominated by those affiliated with the labour movement, which would lead to collective agreements that were marred by concessions based on personal affiliations. Instead, it was argued that a smaller committee composed of councillors and staff with expertise in personnel relations should carry out bargaining. Collective bargaining became the proper purview of industrial relations experts who drew on measured and objective criteria in making decisions.

The report challenged the 'imbalance' that had been created through the growing national organization of labour unions. It was argued that unions had effectively outmanoeuvred the municipalities in the conciliation process as they developed increasingly sophisticated analyses of labour market conditions that had biased board reports in their favour. In response, the industrial relations specialists argued that it was necessary to develop research capacities in establishing a more objective basis for

comparison in determining value. Regional governments such as Metro Toronto were seen as essential in the normalization of labour relations in larger metropolitan areas, which would, in turn, set the pattern for smaller municipalities.

In seeking to match the bargaining capacities of the unions, local government agencies, especially in the larger cities, pushed to centralize administrative capacities by the early 1960s. It was largely for this purpose that the Canadian Federation of Mayors and Municipalities adopted a motion at their 1960 convention to substantially increase the dues for the organization, which more than doubled. A heavy emphasis was placed on developing a centralized hub for the collection of information on labour relations between municipalities. Many civic officials, especially in larger cities, viewed this kind of database as essential in reasserting their authority over the bargaining process. As Noble points out: "Without up-to-date information and wages and working conditions a municipality negotiating is unable to refute the claims made by the union or to propose acceptable alternatives".[13] By 1962, the CFMM had appointed a Research Director, responsible for overseeing the collection of this information, and would open an office in Ottawa where such information would be centrally stored and made available to city governments.

Through the 1960s, civic officials coordinated to establish centralized administrative structures for the calculation of wages and working conditions in local government. Labour relations were increasingly coordinated through personnel relations departments that spread through municipalities, townships, and suburbs across the province. Here, expert administrators trained in the disciplines of industrial relations and labour economics generated standardized statistics. Monthly updates were distributed on

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[13] *Ibid.*

bargaining in other municipalities and job classifications became more uniform. Conceptualizing the 'public sector' as a singular economy, facilitated government at a distance. It facilitated the depoliticization of collective bargaining at the municipal level. Rather than imposing wage guidelines from above, civic officials appeared to draw from a naturalized domain of knowledge – they could speak to the public sector as a distinctive sphere that could be expertly observed and regulated.

Conclusion and Discussion

The struggles of local government workers in Canada are often overlooked in both labour history and urban studies. If they are mentioned at all, they are included as a mere preface in discussions of the unionization of federal and provincial workers in the late 1960s. However, these workers played a significant role in consolidating a Standard Employment Relationship (SER) across government agencies through the post-war period. Through their growing coordination in centralized federations linking together workers in local government agencies and utilities commissions, these workers were able to claim membership as part of a wider public sector and make normative demands for improved wages and working conditions. These struggles fuelled the rapid growth of public sector unions through the 1950s. Through 'connective bargaining' hydro-electrical workers linked up with workers in schools, hospitals, municipalities in establishing some of the largest labour organizations in the country.

The study of local government workers sheds light on the dynamics of state formation through this period. In looking at the 1960s, political economists have typically tended to exaggerate the degree of coherence and uniformity in the state system. The

'golden age' of Keynesianism is often associated with the uniform policies of a bulky, highly centralized state apparatus. Examining the struggles local government workers sheds light on how the state system was actually quite fractured and uneven. In fact, state agencies often lacked the capacity to coordinate their work across jurisdictions.

It is important here to recognize how local government workers were able to gain leverage in their negotiations through their embeddedness in particular kind of urban environments. The proliferation of services across a rapidly growing metropolitan region contributed to a breakdown of established jurisdictions as different government agencies found it increasingly difficult to supervise a large and fragmented workforce. A growing distance between employers and workers, fed by the industrialization of labour in the emerging metropolitan regions, created the potential for the establishment of new forms of worker organization in the 1940s and 1950s. In confronting the tangled, uneven and fractured political and economy landscape, civic, utility, and electrical workers were able to increasingly coordinate their actions, jumping scales to establish general unions between sectors and rapidly expanding their organizations to smaller communities across Ontario.

Through a study of the records and reports of unions and labour federations, local government agencies, and provincial and federal associations, the limited reach of civic officials also becomes apparent. A central challenge through this period was to render employment contracts comparable from an administrative centre. Hence, we can see how workers organized through public sector federations were initially able to achieve a degree of leverage in their bargaining through coordinating across departments and developing shared capacities for research and mobilization. Through the use of experts

with knowledge of statistics and economics, public sector unions were initially able to achieve some success in negotiations with local government agencies. However, in confronting the growing capacities of organized labour, I have also shown how civic officials came to eventually reframe labour relations. By the late 1960s, local government agencies were considerably better coordinated and capable of generating sophisticated knowledge of the public sector landscape. The growing reach of civic officials allowed them to render public sector labour relations 'economic,' creating a basis of re-asserting authority over labour relations across government agencies.

While this study has advanced a preliminary investigation of public sector unionization in local government agencies and attempted to set down a theoretical framework that helps us to understand the uneven landscapes of struggle, there is much more research that needs to be done. Beyond focusing on the centralized records of labour federations and government associations, case studies on unionization efforts in specific municipalities could help to bring out the variegated and place-based texture of struggle in greater depth. Moreover, mapping out these relationships may also contribute to an understanding of the path dependencies that have shaped urban governance strategies through the 1970s and 1980s. Here it is important to highlight how the embeddedness of public workers in the urban landscape and their capacity to generate solidarity across sectors has conditioned struggles around privatization, deregulation, and contracting out.

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