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The Saint John Street Railwaymen's Strike and Riot, 1914

"Riot and Bloodshed in Street Railway Strike", screamed the headlines in Saint John, New Brunswick on July 24, 1914. "Most Disgraceful Disorder in City's History; Howling, Frenzied Mob of Strike Sympathizers".¹ A crowd of some 10,000 people had gathered in the wake of a strike by the city's trolley conductors and motormen. Under cover of darkness the crowd overturned two streetcars, thwarted a cavalry charge, smashed every window in traction company offices, and poured cement on a dynamo, plunging the city into darkness. Newspapers concluded that the "veneer of civilization" had fallen away, revealing the "unbridled passions" and "primitive savagery" of Saint John's populace. According to the press it was the worst night of "wild disorder" in the city's history.² The city's clergymen agreed. A breakdown in the authority of the courts and the family, the *Maritime Baptist* concluded, was responsible for the "spirit of lawlessness" in Saint John. A Congregational minister blamed the riot on idleness and drunkenness.³

Most of these judgments have been repeated by later commentators. In a recent book on Saint John's streetcars, Fred Angus refers to an "angry crowd" which was not really interested in the striking street railwaymen but searching instead for "some excitement". He calls the crowd a mob "out of control"; the riot ended when "common sense" returned.⁴ A former Saint John police chief recalled that a mob, "probably incited by agitators, spread destruction" through the city's business sections. "Once a mob assembles it seems ordinary individual self-control ceases", he concluded, "and otherwise sensible people are influenced by mass behaviourism [*sic*] to rebel against the restraints of law and order".⁵ A participant in the riot, interviewed a half-century afterward, interpreted the episode in similar fashion, maintaining that "communistic" agitators had whipped the crowd into a frenzy. "This fellow was telling them what they were going to do. . . , they were going to wreck the whole thing", he recalled. "I never heard

1 *Standard* (Saint John), 24 July 1914. I am grateful to Allan Greer, Greg Kealey, and Craig Heron for criticism of earlier drafts, and to Ken Brown and the University of Maine, Orono, for research assistance.

2 *Daily Telegraph* (Saint John), 24 July 1914.

3 *Maritime Baptist*, quoted in *Globe* (Saint John), 29 July 1914.

4 Fred Angus, *Loyalist City Streetcars: The Story of Street Railway Transit in Saint John, New Brunswick* (Toronto, 1979), pp. 40-3.

5 E.M. Slader, "From the Victorian Era to the Space Age", *Collections of the New Brunswick Historical Society*, 21 (1973), pp. 44-8.

4 *Acadiensis*

such agitating". He remembered the mob engaging in an orgy of looting and destruction.⁶

But these dramatic events may be understood in a very different light. The weight of historical evidence reveals the Saint John rioters to have been remarkably purposeful in their conduct and highly selective in their choice of targets. Led by a band of young men and boys rather than by radical agitators, they delivered a form of "rough justice" to the extremely unpopular street railway company. By shutting down its operations, the crowd demonstrated their strong support for the recently unionized street railway employees and they effectively nullified the company's use of strikebreakers. Although the crowd listened quietly to official warnings to disperse, they ignored these injunctions on two separate occasions. They did not randomly destroy or steal property, and when they met armed resistance, they sensibly retreated. All this was clearly not wild, savage or irrational behaviour, but purposeful conduct with specific aims in mind. The Saint John rioters behaved like many crowds in history, and when they had finished they went home to bed in the early hours of July 24th, leaving the empty — and once again well-lighted — streets to the militia.⁷

While these dramatic events in Saint John have obvious interest for students of the city and region, they were recurrent features of urban life elsewhere in Canada. Scenes such as those recounted here were also witnessed in Toronto, Hamilton, London, Winnipeg, and Halifax at various times from the 1880s to the 1920s.⁸ Across Canada street railwaymen nursed a variety of work-related

- 6 Tape recorded interview with Albert Whipple, 19 September 1978, by Gary Hughes, New Brunswick Museum [NBM].
- 7 Recent studies of crowd behaviour seriously undermine the traditional view that crowds possessed a collective will independent of the desires or morals of their individual members, followed leaders who played upon their emotions, and engaged in irrational behaviour. Instead, crowds in Europe and America often seem to have behaved quite purposefully, frequently defending traditional ways against sudden changes. See George Rudé, *The Crowd in the French Revolution* (New York, 1959), ch. 12-14; Rudé, *The Crowd in History* (New York, 1964); E.P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century", *Past and Present* 50 (February, 1971), pp. 76-136; Pauline Maier, "Popular Uprisings and Civil Authority in Eighteenth-Century America", *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Series, 27 (January, 1970), pp. 3-35; Natalie Zemon Davis, "The Rites of Violence: Religious Riots in Sixteenth Century France", *Past and Present* 59 (May, 1973), pp. 51-91.
- 8 On the Toronto street railwaymen see G.S. Kealey, *Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism, 1867-1892* (Toronto, 1980), ch. 14, and David Frank, "Trouble in Toronto: The Street Railway Lockout and Strike, 1886", unpublished paper, University of Toronto, 1972; on London, see Bryan Palmer, "'Give us the road and we will run it': the social and cultural matrix of an emerging labour movement", in G. Kealey and P. Warrian, eds., *Essays in Canadian Working Class History* (Toronto, 1976), pp. 106-24; on Hamilton, see B. Palmer, *A Culture in Conflict* (Montreal, 1979), pp. 209-16; on Halifax, see Peter Lambly, "'Not Going Out of Business': Halifax Street Railwaymen and the 'New Unionism', 1908-1918", unpublished paper, Dalhousie University, 1979; on British Columbia, see Pat Roy, "The British Columbia Electric Railway and its Employees", *B.C. Studies* 16 (1972-73), pp. 3-24. The fact that street railway

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grievances, organized into trade unions, and declared strikes. Traction companies fought back, attempting to maintain service and profits by hiring strike-breakers and private detectives. Infuriated citizens often gathered in the streets to vent their anger. City authorities called out the militia to disperse the crowds and restore order. Sometimes the street railwaymen emerged victorious; sometimes they were forced to compromise their demands. What seems abundantly evident is that trolleys served rather paradoxically both as glittering symbols of civic progress and as despised objects of scorn. When Canadian urban-dwellers' lives were disrupted by disputes between trolley-men and traction companies, they could not remain passive onlookers. Perhaps surprisingly, they tended to support the striking street railwaymen against their employers.

Electric trolleys revolutionized urban life and captured the Victorian imagination. Brilliantly lighted cars, featuring varnished wood interiors and decorated with advertising, glided along tracks under a maze of poles and wires. Passengers boarded open cars in the summer, welcoming the fresh breezes wafting through them. Lives lived at the pace of a walking horse suddenly accelerated and the air reverberated with the clang of trolley bells. Children seemed universally fascinated by the machines. The new vehicles quickly insinuated themselves into the daily routine of most urbanites. Once a community had grown beyond the range of pedestrians, street railways became essential for travel. Besides taking the trolley to and from work, people journeyed by trolley to picnics, exchanged Sunday visits, or travelled to parks. Any interruption of service was considered a calamity because trolleys were "so great a necessity in the everyday life" of urban communities.⁹

Saint John residents gladly embraced the trolley and welcomed the changes which came in its wake. Horse-drawn cars appeared in 1866 on a line from Indian-town to Reed's Point which linked ocean with river traffic. The first electrified trolley made its trial run in March of 1893 before a crowd of excited citizens. A year later this company was bought out by a group of Montreal businessmen, railway magnates W.C. Van Horne, R.B. Angus, and T.G. Shaughnessy, who had special reasons for anticipating a profitable venture. Only a few years earlier their own Canadian Pacific Railway "Short Line" had been constructed from Montreal across American territory to Saint John. As

technology appeared within a brief time span in cities across Canada and that street railwaymen from Halifax to Vancouver responded in similar ways to changes at their workplaces, suggests that regional differences in Canadian society and economy might not have been so great for trolley-men (and perhaps other workers) as for the classes above them.

9 Quoted in an editorial, *Globe*, 23 July 1914. "There is probably no single influence", Burton Hendrick wrote in 1919, "that has contributed so much to the pleasure and comfort of the masses as the trolley car"; *The Age of Big Business* (New York, 1919), pp. 122-3. In 1908 there were 53 Canadian trolley lines employing nearly 10,000 workers and grossing \$14 million annually; *Labour Gazette* IX (December, 1908), p. 608. Net earnings averaged a fraction over 6 per cent on capital invested; *Canadian Railway and Marine World* [CRMW] 217 (May, 1909), pp. 364-6.

6 *Acadiensis*

the volume of port business in Saint John increased, the city appeared destined to become the major metropolis of the Maritimes, and their \$92,000 investment in the street railway was likely to yield an excellent return. Promising to provide Canada's new winter port with an efficient and expanded trolley service, they won a 40-year franchise from city councillors and virtually unfettered power to do anything except drive their trolleys faster than ten miles per hour in densely populated areas. Their deluxe new maroon and cream-coloured trolleys with mahogany interiors and brass fittings "excited the admiration of all who have seen them".¹⁰

Traction companies were more closely tied to local communities than most other businesses. Cities granted franchises and rights-of-way. The location of lines, the efficiency of service, and the fares charged were a constant concern of the citizenry. Thus traction companies' balance sheets, management policies, and operating procedures inevitably became political issues. Municipal officials and the travelling public continually demanded new lines and better service, but company managers worried about profit margins and resisted these demands. When construction costs outpaced revenues, a traction company's usual strategy was "to water [its] own stock and squeeze every nickel possible out of the public while spending the minimum on new cars, maintenance of track, further extensions, or added service".¹¹ The St. John Railway Company was no exception to the industry-wide pattern. Promised extension of lines to the populous West Side failed to materialize, and some people began to wonder if the company might not be watering its capital while West Siders suffered in uncomfortable, horse-drawn omnibuses which shuttled back and forth to the suspension bridge linking the two halves of the city. Citizens angrily complained that "the railway clings to the streets where the nickels are the thickest and goes in for easy dividends". City officials tried to purchase the West Side power plant in order to

10 Act to Incorporate the St. John Railway Co., *Journals of the House of Assembly of New Brunswick [JHA]*, 1894, pp. 96-141; *Acts of the Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick [Acts]* 1894, 57 Victoria Ch. 64. See also the typescript history and newspaper clippings collected by George I. Higgins, in Packet No. 59, Street Railways, Saint John Transportation, NBM. On the CPR in Saint John see "Canada's Winter Port", *The New Brunswick Magazine* IV (December, 1904), pp. 209-36.

11 Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., "Introduction", C.W. Cheape, *Moving the Masses* (Cambridge, Mass., 1980), pp. v-vi; Glen E. Holt, "The Changing Perception of Urban Pathology: An Essay on the Development of Mass Transit in the United States", in K.T. Jackson and S.K. Schultz, eds., *Cities in American History* (New York, 1972), pp. 334-5 (quotation); Thomas Conway, Jr., "The Decreasing Financial Returns Upon Street Railway Properties", *Annals of the American Academy* 37 (January, 1911), p. 16. On industry trends see Bion J. Arnold, "The Urban Transportation Problem: A General Discussion", *Annals of the American Academy* 37 (January, 1911), pp. 4-11. D.F. Davis concludes that most Canadian cities extended their trolley lines "well past the point where streetcars could run profitably" and by 1912 these companies were "high risk ventures": "Mass Transit and Private Ownership: An Alternative Perspective on the Case of Toronto", *Urban History Review* 3 (1978), pp. 60-98.

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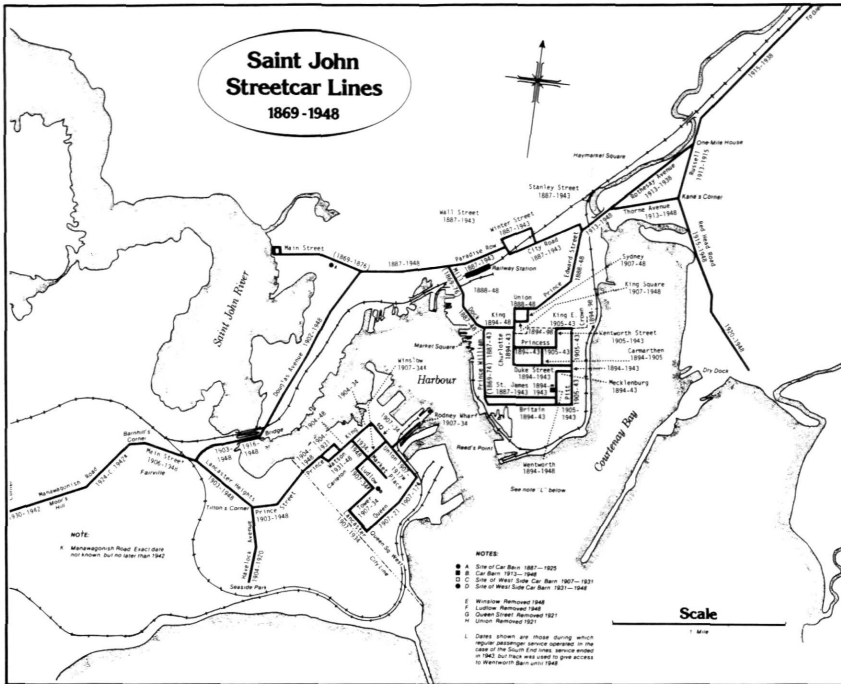


Figure 1. Saint John Streetcar Lines, 1869-1948. (Reprinted with permission from *Loyalist City Streetcars*, Railfare Enterprises, Box 33, West Hill, Ontario, M1E 4R4).

supply a municipal trolley service. Responding directly to this threat, the company hurriedly laid track along Douglas Avenue to the suspension bridge during the summer of 1902. While patronizing the company's new Seaside Park recreational center, residents complained about the overcrowded cars and infrequent service. Some citizens denounced the company's refusal to offer special workers' fares.¹²

By 1905 the Company had become a major political issue in Saint John. Like their counterparts elsewhere in North America, some New Brunswick politicians began to recommend municipal control of public utilities. Tory opposition leader J. Douglas Hazen, a Saint John native, endorsed the city's request to construct a municipal trolley service on the West Side. He thought it would provide a yardstick with which to measure the St. John Railway Company's efficiency. Ignoring this proposal the Liberal provincial government instead

¹² *Acts*, 58 Victoria Ch. 72 (1895); *Synoptic Report of the Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick [Assembly Report]*, 3 March 1897, pp. 124-5, 17 April 1903, p. 84; *Acts*, 60 Victoria Ch. 81 (1897), 3 Edward VII Ch. 79 (1903); *Assembly Report*, 27 March 1901, p. 119; *Acts*, I Edward VII Ch. 62 (1901); *JHA*, 1901, pp. 34-147, 1902, pp. 113-48; *Labour Gazette* V (July, 1904), p. 13, (November, 1904), p. 448.

8 *Acadiensis*

adopted a measure which allowed the city to force the company to remove snow, repair streets, and “to furnish efficient and proper service at all seasons of the year”. Attorney-General William Pugsley boasted that the new law was the most far-reaching legislation of its kind ever enacted in Canada. With a city-owned system derailed for the moment, the company extended lines to the West Side and ran a spur to the ferry wharf, offering Carleton residents a ten-minute service from the ferry to the bridge. By 1909 the system was traversed by about 40 cars, many of them second-hand vehicles bought in the United States. Despite increased passenger traffic the directors noted that net earnings had failed to advance “due to extra car service provided and losses on the West Side”. Still buffeted by public clamour for more track to distant and sparsely settled suburbs, the directors reported that a line to Milledgeville would soon be “in progress”, but the company’s press releases were not followed by new tracklaying.¹³

Public pressure on the company steadily mounted. The Tories under Hazen swept to power in New Brunswick in 1908, abetted in part by a sentiment bearing many of the earmarks of American-style progressive reform. Two years later Hazen introduced a bill to establish a provincial Board of Public Utility Commissioners. The measure required all utilities to furnish “reasonably adequate service”, file a rate schedule, and provide the board with 30 days’ notice of any changes. The Board could fine utilities for violations. The next year the Hazen government strengthened the Boards’ investigatory and enforcement powers.¹⁴

In 1913 the long struggle between the city and the company broke out into open warfare. Furious at the perpetual delays on construction of lines to city suburbs, city legislators introduced bills in Fredericton to charter a rival company. Two Bangor, Maine promoters offered to build lines to Loch Lomond, Westfield, Rothesay, and Milledgeville. For years there had been a “crying need” for suburban railways, Hazen declared: “The city had become congested and conditions of many families were unbearable. Today it was almost impossible to get a building lot in the city, and there was no means of outside transportation so people could live in the suburbs”. Hazen pointed to the more extensive trackage in Bangor, Portland, and other American cities. Another legislator declared that “the common people wanted this railway built, and the only ones that were opposing it was [*sic*] this company which was nothing more or less

13 *Acts*, 5 Edward VII Ch. 58 (1905), 6 Edward VII Ch. 47, 49 (1906), *Assembly Report*, 1905, pp. 152-55, 169-73; *Acts*, 7 Edward VII Ch. 61 (1907); *Labour Gazette*, VII (July, 1906), pp. 12-13, (October, 1906), p. 342, VIII (November, 1907), p. 498, (August, 1907), p. 132. For earnings reports, see *CRMW* 210 (July, 1908), pp. 511-12, 216 (April, 1909), p. 285, 223 (December, 1909), p. 933; Packet No. 59, Street Railways, NBM.

14 *Assembly Report*, 17-18, 28, February, 24 March 1910; *Acts*, 10 Edward VII Ch. 5 (1910); *Assembly Report*, 3, 9 March, 10 April 1911; *Acts*, 1 George V Ch. 55 (1911); *Assembly Report*, 19 April 1912; *Acts*, 2 George V Ch. 15 (1912).

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than a monopoly".¹⁵ At the request of one Saint John businessman, Hazen approached Sir William Mackenzie about buying the St. John Railway Company. But Mackenzie was not interested: "It is nothing more than a 6% stock", he told Hazen, and there was not much money to be made by the company in Saint John. Judging from the sketchy financial data available, the shrewd Mackenzie seems to have been correct. The company had been forced to finance its trackage through frequent bond sales rather than through retained earnings. Its gross earnings per car-mile were significantly lower than for companies in other Canadian cities. Amid rumours of an impending sale to outside interests, the company issued more stock in 1913 to finance extensions. A total of one and one-half miles of track was laid to Kane's Corner and on the Glen Falls line. The directors still steadfastly refused to furnish workmen's tickets which were commonly available in other cities.¹⁶

Press reports in early 1914 suggested that the St. John Railway Company had come under the control of a local syndicate headed by Colonel Hugh H. McLean and F.R. Taylor. The 59-year-old McLean, a prominent Orangeman, Liberal, and the ranking militia officer in Saint John, was considered "one of the foremost commercial and shipping lawyers" in the province. He had represented Canadian Pacific and Bank of Montreal interests for years and had been a member of the original group which had purchased the trolley line in 1894. The death of James Ross and McLean's elevation to the presidency of the company in 1913 probably confirm these rumours. Other directors included F.R. Taylor, a member of McLean's law firm and a representative of the company's interests before the legislature; Senator W.H. Thorne, a prominent Saint John merchant who controlled one of the largest hardware firms in the region; James Manchester, a partner in Manchester-Robertson-Allison Ltd., the leading wholesale and retail dry goods house in the Maritimes; and R.B. Emerson, a successful city stove merchant. These men, along with general manager H.M. Hopper who had risen through company ranks from an accountancy, controlled the destiny of the firm during the months when demands for an

15 *Assembly Report*, (Committees), 6, 19 March 1913; *Acts*, 3 George V Ch. 66, 67 (1913), 4 George V Ch. 82 (1914). The Bangor promoters also tried unsuccessfully to buy the St. John Railway Co. for \$1.2 million; *CRMW* (April, 1913), p. 186.

16 M.W. Doherty to J.D. Hazen, 8 July 1912; J.D. Hazen to M.F. Doherty, 8 July 1912; J.D. Hazen to J.H. Dunn, 20 July 1912, J.D. Hazen Papers, File 46, Box 5, University of New Brunswick Archives. In 1918 the company's proportion of traffic to mileage of track was "said to be less" than for other cities of similar size; see insert at p. 316 in *Saint John Board of Trade Minutes*, 12 November 1915, NBM. In 1911 gross earnings per car-mile averaged .185¢ for the St. John Railway Company, .208¢ for the Ottawa Electric Railway, .263¢ for Halifax Electric Traction, .278¢ for Toronto Railway, .282¢ for Hamilton Street Railway, .290¢ for Montreal Street Railway, and .336¢ for B.C. Electric Railway; see *CRMW* (February, 1913). See also *Minutes of the Executive Council of New Brunswick*, vol. 17, 6 August 1913, p. 143; *CRMW* (September, 1913); *Busy East IV* (December, 1913) p. 36; *CRMW* 191 (January, 1914), pp. 39-41; *CRMW* 192 (February, 1914), p. 88; *Eastern Labor News*, 28 June 1913.

10 *Acadiensis*

extension of traction lines peaked. They steadfastly resisted most of these pressures because their earnings compared unfavorably with those of other systems. Such was the corporate context in the spring of 1914 when the decidedly unpopular St. John Railway Company faced a challenge to its authority from its motormen and conductors, recently organized into Local 663 of the Amalgamated Association of Street and Electric Railway Employees.¹⁷

Trade unions were deeply rooted in the history of Saint John. By the end of the 1870s, though, organizations of millmen and ship-labourers, the two most cohesive working-class groups, had fallen upon hard times. The stagnating Maritimes economy drove thousands to the “Boston States” and left those who remained isolated from their brethren in Halifax, Toronto, or Montreal. Short gusts of industrialization touched the city’s economy only in patches, leaving older and essentially preindustrial shops alongside more modern mills, foundries, and factories. This undermined collaboration across trades and probably explains in part why the Knights of Labor barely touched the city’s workers in the 1880s. “The workingmen of this town are not exactly dead”, John Armstrong, a visiting printer from Toronto, declared in 1888, “but they’re sleeping so soundly that it would take a medical examination to determine their condition”. A handful of craft union locals persisted into the next decade in Saint John, banding together into a moribund trades council. But the city still remained essentially a “face-to-face” community until the end of the 19th century. Wealthy merchants and poor dockworkers lived within the same small compass. Workers who deferred to the elites often received a helping hand, perhaps even a job, during difficult times. Strong traditions of patronage and deference blended nicely with an artisan culture which accepted the “new” industrial morality of sobriety, punctuality, thrift, and hard work. In the 1890s Saint John’s artisans identified with their employers more than with their fellow workers. For most, the key divisions in work, leisure, politics and on the temperance question were still ethnic and religious rather than socio-economic. But accelerating changes at the workplace during the years preceding the First World War brought a new surge of class consciousness to Saint John workers.¹⁸

Longshoremen led the way. As a result of the rapid expansion of the city’s

17 *CRMW* 193 (March, 1914), p. 137; H.J. Morgan, ed., *Canadian Men and Women of the Time* (Toronto, 1912), pp. 781, 727, 1101.

18 *Progress* (Saint John), 5 May 1888 (quotation); *Minutes of the Saint John Trades and Labor Council, 1891-1898*, NBM; *Minutes of ITU Local No. 85, Saint John*, in the 1890s, NBM. On industrialism in Saint John see T.W. Acheson, “The National Policy and the Industrialization of the Maritimes, 1880-1910”, *Acadiensis* I (Spring, 1972), pp. 3-28; Robert H. Babcock, “Economic Development in Portland (Me.) and Saint John (N.B.) During the Age of Iron and Steam, 1850-1914”, *The American Review of Canadian Studies* IX (Spring, 1979), pp. 3-37. On 19th century trade unions in Saint John see James Richard Rice, “A History of Organized Labour in Saint John, New Brunswick, 1813-1890”, MA thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1968.

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winter port activities, they began confronting large absentee shipping companies in periodic struggles for control over wages and working conditions on the docks. After a long struggle they finally recaptured firm control of all waterfront trades and established new work rules following a successful strike in 1913. Building trades were not far behind; visiting organizers from Ontario and neighbouring American states revived the trade union message and set up locals of carpenters as well as cigar-makers, printers, tailors and street railwaymen. Saint John's building trades were the first in the Maritimes to win the eight-hour day in their occupations. The carpenters' business agent, James L. Sugrue, served as president of the revived Saint John Trades and Labour Council and in 1913 assumed the leadership of the new provincial federation of labour. On a wave of prosperity stimulated partly by millions of federal dollars being poured into city wharves, warehouses, dredging, and breakwater construction, the "new unionism" spread slowly to other industries. Several successful strikes strengthened the labour movement and both Grit and Tory politicians began openly courting the working class vote in Saint John. A factories act (1905) and a workmen's compensation law (1908) testified to the new visibility and political clout of organized workers. Symbolizing this new era of working-class cohesiveness, the city's trade unions organized a monster Labour Day parade in 1913. Proudly carrying their banners aloft, teamsters, printers, carpenters, plumbers, dredgemen, moulders and other artisans and workers marched to traditional band music as thousands of spectators lined the city's streets. For growing numbers of the city's workers, older ethnic and religious outlooks had yielded to a new perspective rooted in the workplace and union hall.¹⁹

Nevertheless, one observer concluded, it was "exceedingly doubtful whether the workers of St. John are better off than they were a generation ago".²⁰ Many of the less skilled working in larger factories remained at the mercy of employers who resisted worker demands and adopted new machinery or techniques that undermined customary work habits and often resulted in more work for less pay. During the summer of 1913 the city's influential sawmill owners successfully locked out 1,000 millmen attempting to organize a union. The struggle caused much hardship in the city's North End. Perennial assurances

19 Robert H. Babcock, "Labour, Socialism and Reform Politics in Portland (Maine) and Saint John (New Brunswick), 1895-1914", paper read at the Canadian Historical Association meetings, Montreal, June 1980, pp. 10-22. On the street railwaymen's union see *Labour Gazette* IV (October, 1903), pp. 292-3; *Motorman and Conductor [MC]* 12 (March, 1904), p. 23; *Labour Gazette* XIII (June 1913), p. 1345; *Globe*, 2 September 1913; *Evening Times-Star* (Saint John) 14 July 1914. In 1913 the Trades and Labour Council represented nearly 4,000 workers, or about 40 per cent of the labour force in Saint John, organized into 21 unions. *Annual Report on Labour Organization in Canada, 1913*, (Ottawa, 1914), pp. 12, 153; *Census of Canada, 1911*, vol. VI, Table VI, pp. 350-61. See also David Montgomery, "The 'new unionism' and the transformation of workers' consciousness in America, 1909-22", in *Workers' Control in America* (New York, 1979), pp. 91-112.

20 *Eastern Labor News*, 9 March 1912.

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from city elites that the winter port business guaranteed the city a bright economic future seemed to vaporize during the depression of 1913-14. Unemployment soared and charities reported "more poverty and actual destitution now than has been observed for a considerable time". Attempts by trade unionists to acquire a greater voice by electing working class representatives to city government failed in both 1912 and 1913.²¹

By delaying the realization of workers' aspirations through its failure to lay track, the company undoubtedly provoked heightened resentment. City elites had already begun their exodus to the suburbs, and William Pugsley owned a real estate company erecting low-cost houses on the eastern outskirts of the city. Pugsley sent his promotional newspaper to the city trades and labour council's reading room. His advertisements gave prominence to a letter from the St. John Railway Company which promised a line to the suburban (Glen Falls) site under the headline: "Street Car Line to Make Country Homes Possible". Jammed into sub-standard tenements in the Haymarket section of Saint John, many workers yearned for clean air, sunshine, and a cottage of their own. Concluded one reformer: "It is low wages, high rents, and unsanitary, wretched houses that tend to produce the unhappy discontented class of citizens".²²

No doubt trolley men shared some of the same feelings of distress over their deteriorating living and working standards when they formed a union in 1903. But local contributors to *Motorman & Conductor* voiced no complaints about their jobs, and the union appeared to do little more than organize sporting events or moonlight excursions on the St. John River. The street railwaymen's journal suggests in various ways that the "rewards" of the service occasionally outweighed the long hours, low pay and bad weather. Clad in a blue serge uniform with cap, metal badge, and brass or white buttons, a street railwayman cut an imposing figure. While a motorman stood at the front of the car with his left hand on the controller and right hand on the brake lever, a conductor moved up and down the aisle, bantering with passengers, making change, collecting fares, and issuing transfers. The dandies among them flirted with the prettiest girls or stole glimpses of a shapely ankle ascending the trolley. Over the years many trolley men achieved a certain popularity and renown among the travelling public. But by 1914, when unionized artisans in the city had won an eight-hour day, the ten-hour day and seven-day week was less acceptable to street

21 For an excellent illustration of new management policies and workers' response, see data on the Saint John nail workers in Records of the Department of Labour (RG27), Public Archives of Canada [PAC], Strikes and Lockouts Files, vol. 299, No. 3436 (1911), vol. 303, No. 36 (1914). On the C.P.R. and winter port traffic, see Babcock, "Labour, Socialism", pp. 35-6; on unemployment in 1913-14, see *Labour Gazette*, XIV (February, 1914), p. 874, which concluded that the "great slump" in the city labour market was owed "no doubt" to declining port business; *Standard* (Saint John) 24 February 1914 (quotation).

22 *Eastern Labor News*, 25 November 1911, 8 March (quotation, 15 March, 12, 26 April 1913; Trades and Labor Congress, *Proceedings*, 1912, p. 83; *Daily Telegraph*, 17 July 1914.

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railwaymen. They were not impervious to the growth of class consciousness and trade unionism in Saint John on the eve of the First World War. More than half the men who set up a new street railwaymen's local in 1914 had previously worked in the city as millmen, longshoremen, or labourers. They were younger and more militant workers who had joined the trolley service within the previous four years and had little seniority to lose. One union member noted: "The time has come when we fully realize the importance of being organized for our own benefit"²³

Years earlier the Amalgamated Association of Street and Electric Railway Employees had established several locals in Canadian cities. The union's leading Canadian was Magnus Sinclair, a middle-aged Toronto conductor and graduate of Edinburgh University. Sinclair regularly crossed the country to set up locals and revive flagging interest. In the spring of 1914 he spent several weeks organizing trolley men in the Maritimes. His efforts in Saint John culminated on May 1 at the Odd Fellows' Hall when Local No. 663 was launched with 80 members. Fred Ramsey, an ex-millman who had joined the service about ten years earlier, was chosen to lead them. "Our president is working hard to get the men together", the local reported, "and deserves much credit for the way he is handling the business". All but a dozen or so of the motormen and conductors were enrolled. The St. John Railway Company quickly hired a private detective to spy on the union and its leaders.²⁴

Three weeks after the street railwaymen had organized their union, the company fired Ramsey. It accused him of leaving his streetcar and entering a saloon. Denying the charge, Ramsey appealed for an investigation, but Secretary H.M. Hopper flatly refused. Concluding that the company had decided to wage war on their union, the street railwaymen sent to Halifax for Sidney Mosher, the Amalgamated's Maritimes agent.²⁵ But the company refused to negotiate; Hopper did not want to "have anything to do" with Mosher and denied another re-

23 *MC* 12 (March, 1904), p. 23, (July 1904), p. 28, 22 (May, 1914), p. 29 (quotation). The earlier local dissolved in 1909 due to "lack of interest": *Labour Gazette* X (March, 1910), p. 1004. Albert Whipple, who lived on the West Side in 1914, recalled hearing the sons of conductors talk about unions; Whipple Interview, NBM. The profile of street railwaymen is based on a comparison of 21 union members with 39 motormen and conductors selected at random and traced through Saint John city directories for the years 1900, 1905, 1910, and 1914. While 12 of the 21 leaders of Local No. 663 had previously worked on the docks, in the sawmills, or as labourers, only 4 of the 39 in the other group had done so.

24 For a brief history of the Amalgamated see *MC* 22 (June, 1914), pp. 6-8. Active Canadian locals were reported in Victoria, Toronto, Hamilton, Windsor, Winnipeg, and New Westminster in *MC* 14 (January, 1906), pp. 24-5. On Local No. 663 see *MC* 22 (June 1914), p. 29, (August, 1914), p. 13; *Standard*, 1 May 1914, *Globe*, 1, 8 May 1914.

25 *Labour Gazette*, XV (August, 1914), p. 307, which is based on the material in RG27, vol. 303, No. 41, PAC; *MC* 22 (May, 1914), p. 29. Summaries of the strike events are also found in *CRMW* 198 (August, 1914), p. 387, and *MC* 22 (August, 1914), p. 13, and in the four daily newspapers published in Saint John in 1914. Press accounts vary only in minor detail or emphasis.

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quest to investigate Ramsey's case. Aroused, the trolley men filed a request for a conciliation board under the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act. "All the union wants is an investigation", one newspaper declared. "If the Company can prove the charge against Mr. Ramsey, the Union will let the matter drop". If it came to a showdown, Mosher threatened, "Not only the motormen and conductors, but the men who furnish the city with electric power and lighting will walk out".²⁶

After receiving statements from both sides, on June 10 the federal minister of labour, T.W. Crothers, authorized the establishment of a three-man conciliation board. The street railwaymen promptly selected Trades and Labour Council President James L. Sugrue to sit for them. The company stalled, failing to select its man and forcing the minister finally to choose a county judge, J. Gordon Forbes. Sugrue and Forbes jointly nominated R.T. Hayes, a Saint John steamship agent, as chairman. Five weeks after Ramsey's dismissal, the board gathered in the county court chambers to hear testimony. Both the saloonkeeper and Ramsey's colleagues denied that the conductor had entered the tavern in question while on duty. The company's inspector admitted failing to catch Ramsey violating the rules. Only the company detective swore that Ramsey was guilty. On the other hand three of Ramsey's fellow workers told of having to promise not to join a union as a condition of their employment, thereby bolstering the union's charge that the company was attempting to break up the new local. Local No. 663's lawyer concluded that the company had failed to prove that Ramsey had been drinking. In early July the board submitted its recommendations, asking the company to negotiate with union leaders on the issues, to investigate all charges made against its employees, and to reinstate with back pay those found innocent. All employees, the board said, should be granted the right of appeal to the company directors. As for Ramsey, the board noted the conflicting evidence regarding his conduct, admitted the company's need to enforce discipline, and "understood" that the union president would be given a job in the company's car barns. Jubilant over what they considered to be a "substantial" victory, the men denied rumours of an impending strike and voiced their satisfaction with the board's report.²⁷

But the company ignored the board's recommendations. It refused to take Ramsey back in any capacity and on July 8 issued tough new work rules for all its motormen and conductors. The new rules deviated significantly from informal practices and revealed a grim determination by the company to tighten control over its employees.²⁸ These tactics surprised both the board and Mosher,

26 *Standard*, 4, 11 June 1914. See also *Globe*, 8 June 1914.

27 *Standard*, 11, 17, 22 June, 8 July 1914; *Globe*, 15, 18, 22, 30 June, 4, 8 July 1914; *Evening Times-Star*, 30 June, 3, 8, 9 July 1914; *Daily Telegraph*, 4 July 1914. The text of the board's report is found in *Labour Gazette*, XV (August, 1914), p. 200.

28 These rules appear to reflect an effort by the Canadian street railway industry, at the request of officials in Ottawa, to standardize operating procedures across the nation. In 1911 the Board of

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who had left town confident that the crisis was over. Before Mosher could return, the company went even further. On Saturday, July 18, eight men were fired, charged with violating the new regulations. On Monday the 20th three more employees were discharged. By this time seven men had been fired for violating a new rule regarding steam railway crossings, two for talking with motormen, and two for carrying motormen out of uniform for free. The company hired non-union men to fill the vacancies. All those now joining Ramsey on the street had been prominent in Local No. 663's affairs. According to a report in the *Globe*, "Some of the men said that if they did not call a strike soon they would all be fired".²⁹ The conciliation board was hastily reconvened to hear the new issues. Company officials refused to discuss them; they wished to avoid "trouble", Hopper declared, but they had no position available for Ramsey. The question of union recognition had not been submitted to the board by the company, he noted, adding that the new rules laid down by the company "were being insisted upon to preserve the discipline of the system".³⁰

"Street Railway Trouble Serious", the *Globe* declared. In an atmosphere of rising public concern, both sides manoeuvred for advantage. The company claimed that its new regulations were in the interest of public safety. The discharged men had "deliberately and wilfully violated" them. There had never been grievances before this time, Hopper declared, and Mosher, the union leader, had started all the trouble. "The whole reason of the fight at the present time", he asserted, "is that the Street Railway Union want to take control of the management of the company's business".³¹ Noting that Hopper had told him

Railway Commissioners asked the Canadian Street Railway Association to compile a code of operating rules. A committee of the CSRA, meeting on the verandah of the Royal Canadian Yacht Club at Toronto Island, drafted the code and forwarded it to the Board in Ottawa. Since H.M. Hopper was on the CSRA executive, his company's new rules probably reflected this code. In Saint John motormen and conductors henceforth were forbidden to carry passengers (including company employees out of uniform) for free; drink or carry liquor; enter places where liquor was sold; smoke; allow one man to run the trolley; "loaf" at the end of the line; talk with each other while the trolley was in motion; leave without permission; or engage in "wilful negligence, incompetency, or making false statements". At all steam railway crossings conductors were required to disembark from trolleys and proceed on foot across the tracks ahead of the car. *Evening Times-Star*, 11, 18 July 1914, *Globe*, 17 July 1914, *Daily Telegraph*, 11 July 1914, CRMW 160 (July, 1911), p. 677, (August 1911), p. 785. Records of the Department of Railways and Canals reveal that several city businesses had obtained ICR sidings which crossed street railway tracks; see RG43 A2'A Series, vols. 120, 136, 152, 351, 362, (1912-15), PAC. A trolley had received serious damage at a CPR crossing three months earlier and street railwaymen had been warned at that time about the need to bring their cars to a full stop at such intersections; H.H. McLean to W.T. Crother's [sic], 20 July 1914, Hazen Papers, Box 12-113, UNB Archives.

29 *Evening Times-Star*, 20 July 1914, *Standard*, 20, 21 July 1914, *Globe*, 21 July 1914 (quotation); *Daily Telegraph*, 20 July 1914, *Morning Chronicle* (Halifax), 21 July 1914.

30 *Standard*, 21 July 1914; *Globe*, 21 July 1914.

31 *Globe* 20, 21 July 1914; *Daily Telegraph*, 21, 22 July 1914; *Standard*, 22 July 1914. The company's stand is outlined in a letter from McLean to Crothers on 20 July 1914, cited in footnote 28

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“to go to hell” when he had asked for an interview, Mosher responded that “the time has gone by for a big public utility company to attempt to prevent its men exercising the right to form a union”. At 3 a.m. on July 22, Local No. 663 voted overwhelmingly to go out on strike against the St. John Railway Company. The fight was on.³²

The first “skirmishes” took place at the car barns on Wentworth Street. While knots of strikers encouraged their non-unionized brethren to join them, Hopper and company president H.H. McLean urged them to stay on the job or return to work to maintain trolley service. The company managed to send only one-third of its cars on their appointed rounds, and newspapers later reported that the company had hired 50 strikebreakers from a Montreal detective agency. At the company’s request Saint John’s mayor swore in six special police officers. Meanwhile, on the first day of the strike, the union inducted more members, including some of the older and most popular conductors.³³

As both sides campaigned for public support, the conflict soon spread from the car barns to the streets of Saint John. “The men were gathered about the streets early in the morning in small knots”, newspapers observed, “surrounded at times by friends and at others by portions of a curious public, discussing the situation”.³⁴ Some non-union trolley men left their cars in the middle of the street to join nearby groups of strikers. Local No. 663 hired a horse-drawn bus to provide service to Fairville residents inconvenienced by the strike. Public attention was soon riveted on the train station where the federal labour minister was expected on the late afternoon express. But Crothers failed to appear; “he gave us the slip, an unmanly trick indeed”, Mosher complained. “The only fear that now exists”, the *Evening Times-Star* concluded, “is that there will be trouble as soon as the Montreal men commence their duties”.³⁵

All day the 136 striking street railwaymen walked the streets in their uniforms. Parading under banners declaring “WE WILL WALK” and “WE FIGHT FOR FREEDOM”, the men marched up and down the major thoroughfares of Saint John, followed by a crowd of men and boys chanting “LET EVERYBODY WALK!” and deliberately slowing the movement of the few remaining trolleys. Bystanders cheered the strikers at every streetcorner. “WE WILL BE WITH YOU TONIGHT, BOYS” some called out. Cries of “SCAB!”, “SCAB!” rang in the ears of those still working. During another

above. Street railwaymen recognized the implications of Hopper’s and McLean’s “safety-first” argument. “It is difficult. . .to exercise safety first on a job that is uninviting from low wages and unpleasant working conditions”, one noted in *MC* 22 (June, 1914), p. 5. Mosher questioned the Company’s sudden new solicitude for safety in *Standard*, 22 July 1914.

32 *Standard*, 22 July 1914; *Globe*, 23 July 1914.

33 *Evening Times-Star*, 22 July 1914.

34 *Evening Times-Star*, 22 July 1914; *Globe*, 22 July 1914.

35 *Daily Telegraph*, 23 July 1914; *Evening Times-Star*, 23 July 1914.

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parade that evening 2,000 people gathered at the corner of Douglas Avenue and Main Street to cheer the strikers, and by the time the paraders and their band had reached the hall on Union Street the crowd had grown to 7,000 or 8,000 shouting and cheering people. The street railwaymen were in "the best of spirits and most confident of the result", Mosher told the press. Several city merchants promised the strikers free goods and services.³⁶

The St. John Railway Company directors remained firm. Although the strikers had let it be known that they would return to work if the company abided by the conciliation board recommendations concerning Ramsey, Hopper refused to budge. He would not tell reporters whether the company planned to import strikebreakers; "it is a matter that concerns the directors", he asserted. But at noon on July 23 a special steel railway car attached to the Atlantic Express brought 15 strikebreakers from Montreal. The company purchased a batch of labour licences (at \$5 a head) from the city for these imported workers and advertised in the next day's newspaper for trainees. Asked if there was any prospect for a settlement, Hopper replied: "Not on our part".³⁷

By this time the strikers appeared to have gained widespread public sympathy. On Prince William Street a coachman walked his horses along the tracks, compelling a trolley to reduce its speed for a considerable distance. Rather than use the streetcars, many citizens drove buckboards into town. "Well, how far did you walk today?" people asked. Local unions of dredgemen, carpenters, and longshoremen adopted resolutions of sympathy or pledges of money. By nightfall the strikers had gained more confidence from this support. "All we are asking for is a square deal", Mosher declared, "and in that the public is with us". But Mosher feared the consequences if the company's strikebreakers operated the trolleys. "I should judge from the temper of the citizens that outside strikebreakers would start something doing", he predicted. As dusk turned to darkness, Saint John became noticeably more tense.

Trouble started when a group of men and boys blocked a trolley at the corner of King and Charlotte Streets. The strikebreaking motorman slowly edged his car through the crowd and down Charlotte, passing a large gathering in King Square who were listening to a military band and apparently oblivious of the noisy crowd. The crowd halted at the foot of King Street hill in Market Square. The hubbub attracted others and the area was soon jammed with humanity. "I was picked up literally and carried by the crowd", Albert Whipple recollected; "my feet weren't even touching the ground".³⁸

While it is impossible to know the precise size or composition of the crowd, newspaper accounts and eyewitnesses who testified at a later inquiry agree on a

36 *Daily Telegraph*, 23 July 1914.

37 *Evening Times-Star*, 23 July 1914; *Standard*, 23 July 1914; *Daily Telegraph*, 24 July 1914; *Globe*, 24 July 1914.

38 *Evening Times-Star*, 23 July 1914; *Standard*, 23 July 1914; Whipple Interview, NBM.

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number of observations. At the core of the crowd were several dozen young men and boys who were most active in physically expressing the crowd's hostility to the traction company. Six of the eight later arrested and brought to trial — all young unmarried males in unskilled occupations — represented this group. They were surrounded by a much larger mass of men, women, and children, who offered verbal and physical encouragement to the youths. Both the police and the mayor remarked upon the large percentage of "respectable classes" here. Of the two arrested from this group, one middle-aged deaf mute was charged with physically abetting the youths while another man was indicted for offering verbal encouragement. On the fringes of the crowd, several prominent business and civic leaders stood and watched the tumult. Police estimated that at its peak the crowd numbered between 8,000 and 10,000 people.

Cheering and hooting escalated when a trolley swung around the curve of Dock Street and came into view. The crowd rushed forward and then fell in behind the vehicle, throwing stones conveniently obtained from a nearby sewer project. Frightened passengers were showered with window glass. A "scab" conductor at the rear of the trolley tried to ward off the crowd with an iron switch-bar but only infuriated his pursuers when he struck a man squarely on the head. The ensuing hail of rocks destroyed all the remaining windows, knocking a woman passenger unconscious and reducing several youngsters to tears. This trolley finally escaped down Prince William Street and the crowd waited impatiently for the next cars to appear. The passengers were permitted to leave under a shower of stones, but the scab crews were severely jostled until a policeman finally rescued them.³⁹

The handful of police on duty seemed unable or unwilling to maintain control. Of the force of 40-odd men, half had just finished a 12-hour shift and had gone home. One policeman caught hold of some rioters, but they twisted away and he was pummelled by the crowd. The mayor said later that if the police had had instructions to shoot they "might have terrified the mob". But only one policeman used his revolver. Officer Fred Lucas tried to arrest a stone thrower; the crowd interfered and began to beat him. Briefly freeing himself, Lucas backed against Thorne's hardware store, drew his weapon, and fired three shots into the air as a warning and call for help. As the crowd pressed closer, he fired two more shots toward the ground, injuring one man — a deckhand on the government harbour dredge — in the thigh. Then the crowd overpowered Lucas, disarmed him, and nearly pushed the unfortunate policeman through a store window before he escaped up Chipman Hill with the aid of a detective.⁴⁰

Sounds of band music diverted the crowd from Lucas. Across the square the striking street railwaymen marched by in their uniforms. Maintaining strict discipline, they had not been involved in the fracas but had just returned to the city

39 *Evening Times-Star*, 24 July 1914; *Daily Telegraph*, 24 July 1914; *Globe*, 24 July 1914.

40 *Ibid.* Lucas gave his own version in *Daily Telegraph*, 24 July 1914.

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from the West Side on the 9 p.m. ferry and were greeted by loud cheers from the huge assemblage. One of those present was Mayor James Frink, who had been observing the “jostling, surging, yelling, shouting” crowd with increasing concern, and had decided to read the Riot Act. The parade of strikers had barely passed when he mounted the curb at the fountain on Market Square and instructed his hearers to return to their homes under pain of life imprisonment. The crowd received his words in “absolute silence” but made no move to disperse.

At police chief W. Walter Clark’s headquarters, the telephone rang incessantly. Unable to reach militia commanders at their distant summer residences, Clark asked Judge Forbes to request assistance from the commander of a small detachment of Royal Canadian Dragoons in Saint John.⁴¹ These regular army men had arrived in the city two months earlier to conduct a training school in preparation for the local militia’s annual summer exercises.⁴² Lieutenant Hubert Stethen and six soldiers received Forbes’ call at the armoury, quickly mounted their horses, and galloped through the streets to the head of King Street. The horsemen alerted concertgoers at King Square to the presence of the crowd below them. Many rushed to watch the cavalrymen charge down King Street into the people massed in Market Square. Their ceremonial, flat-edged swords in hand, their horses rearing and plunging, the Dragoons slashed left and right, knocking down and cutting or bruising scores of men, women, and children. Forming a circle around the stalled trolleys, they beat back the crowd with their swords, pressing the crowd into a solid mass on the sidewalks. Then someone threw a bottle or stone. The soldiers responded by slashing and thrusting in two separate attempts to sweep people from the sidewalks. Angered, the crowd refused to yield, giving up only the middle of the street to the Dragoons and closing in behind the handful of soldiers after each flurry. At this point Stethen was struck in the face by a rock and nearly unhorsed. Another trooper suffered a broken hand from warding off a rock; still another’s shoulder was badly bruised by a missile. Two horses were slashed by the crowd. Battered, bruised, and bloodied, the soldiers retreated up King Street at a trot with the shrieks, cries and yells of men and women trailing after them.⁴³

After one of the more foolhardy cavalry charges in the annals of Canadian military history, the Royal Canadian Dragoons had left a number of injured and

41 Since the president of the St. John Railway, Colonel H.H. McLean, was also the senior military officer in the city, he suggested to Forbes that his second-in-command, Lt. Col. J.L. McAvity, be requested to take charge. However, McAvity, the scion of the founder of a large brass foundry in the city, was beyond reach of the telephone at his summer home on the east side of Courtenay Bay (Red Head), and Forbes turned to the Dragoons.

42 *Standard*, 19 May, 3 June 1914; *Globe*, 18 May, 12, 20, 26 June, 7 July 1914; *Daily Telegraph*, 7 July 1914.

43 *Evening Times-Star*, 24 July 1914; *Globe*, 24 July 1914; *Daily Telegraph*, 24 July 1914; *Standard*, 24 July 1914.

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bruised citizens in their wake.⁴⁴ An Intercolonial Railway conductor suffered a gash on his arm when he raised it to protect his face. One man's cheek displayed a deep cut; another's fingers were broken. A woman seen attempting to unhorse one of the Dragoons suffered a direct blow on her face from a sword and was carried away. Although Stethen and his men had been vastly outnumbered, the lieutenant told a reporter how lucky the crowd had been to escape so "easily". He had observed the man who had hit him reaching for a rock, had rushed toward him, and had cut the man's straw hat nearly in two. "Had there been edges on [my] sword he would have been killed", Stethen declared. He blamed the presence of women and girls in the crowd for much of the Dragoons' failure. "We used them as nicely as possible", he continued, "and advised them to leave, but in spite of this they clung around, and if any of them were injured it was their own fault". Nevertheless the *Globe* noted the "reckless, vicious" way the Dragoons drove into the crowd: "One woman with a Salvation Army bonnet on her head and a tambourine under her arm was struck by the sword of a soldier and cut slightly on the head".⁴⁵

As the hoofbeats of the Dragoons faded away, the crowd in Market Square turned to the stalled trolleys in their midst. Cries of "BURN THE CARS!" and "TURN THEM OVER!" rang out. The first attempts to upset the heavy trolleys failed. But cheered on by the spectators, one youth climbed the car to disengage its pole. Ropes obtained from a schooner in nearby Market Slip were attached to the car's window-casings. While perhaps 50 men tugged at the rope on one side, dozens lifted on the other side until the car began to rock back and forth, teetering momentarily until it fell over with a thud. A mighty cheer arose as the second car was speedily overturned.⁴⁶

"THE POWER HOUSE!" "PUT THE LIGHTS OUT!" someone shouted. At about 11 p.m. the crowd moved from Market Square down Dock Street to the St. John Railway Company building, where generators provided all the city's electrical power. "THE COMPANY HAS NO FRIENDS; GIVE IT TO THEM, BOYS. THEY DON'T OWN THE TOWN TONIGHT!" Some began smashing windows while others attacked displays in street-level showrooms. Still others converged on the generators. A bag of cement effectively stopped one of the dynamos and workmen decided to shut down the remaining equipment.⁴⁷ As the lights went out in Saint John the crowd roared and shouted their approval. Within minutes some fearful property-owners had begun

44 It was not the first time that cavalry had charged a crowd of Canadian citizens; see Desmond Morton, "Aid to the Civil Power: The Canadian Militia in Support of Social Order, 1867-1914", *Canadian Historical Review* LI (December, 1970), pp. 407-25.

45 *Globe*, 24 July 1914; *Evening Times-Star*, 24 July 1914; *Daily Telegraph*, 24 July 1914.

46 *Daily Telegraph*, 24 July 1914; *Evening Times-Star*, 24 July 1914.

47 Damage at the power plant, the *Globe* said, indicated that some in the crowd had "a thorough knowledge" of its layout. *Globe*, 24 July 1914; *Evening Times-Star*, 24 July 1914; *Daily Telegraph*, 24 July 1914.

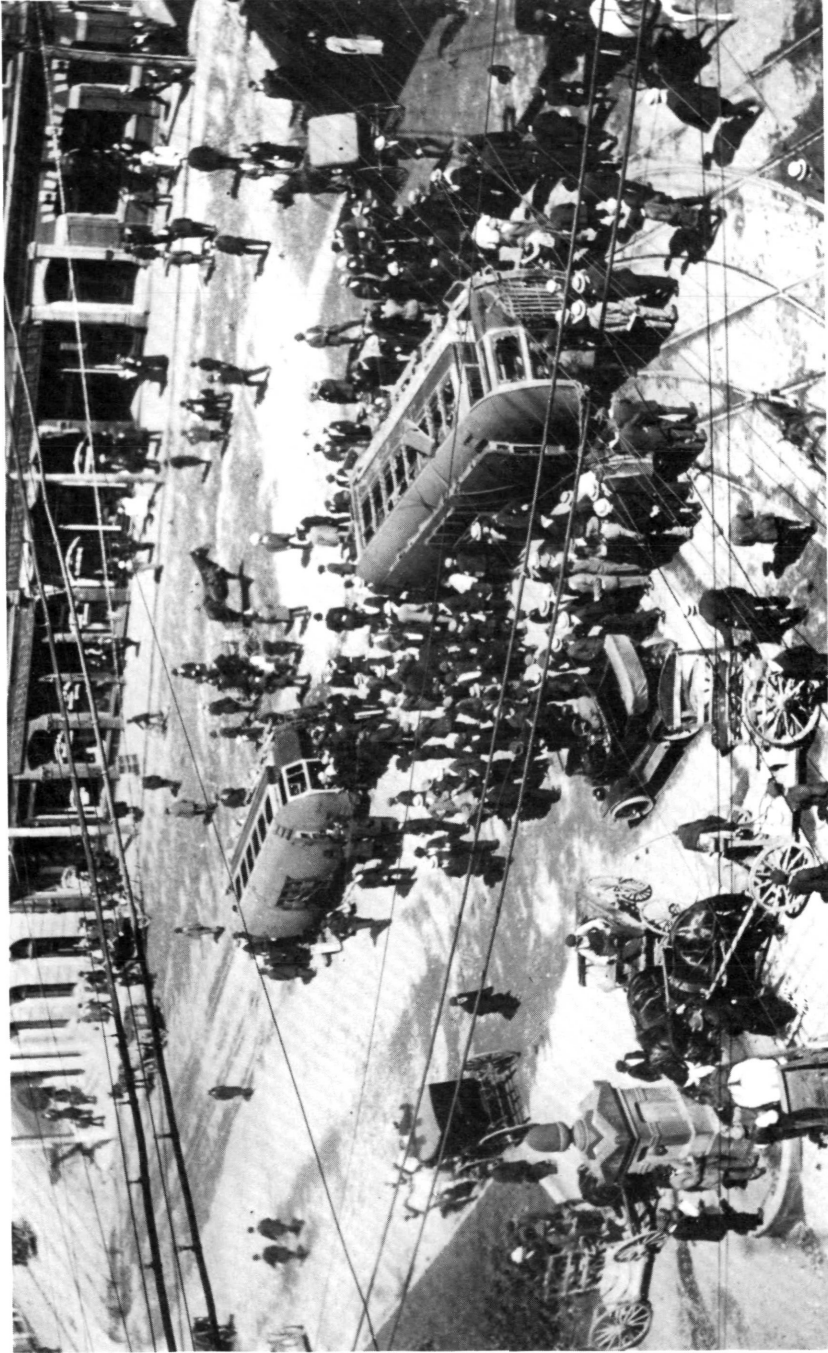


Figure 2. Market Square, Saint John on the morning of 24 July 1914. The night before the Mayor had read the Riot Act from the curb of the fountain, shown at the bottom left in this photograph. (New Brunswick Museum).

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to drive their autos up and down streets to light them by headlights. Less frantic or affluent citizens placed candles and lamps in their windows.⁴⁸

The crowd remained determined to mete out a rough form of justice to the despised street railway company. There were cries of "THE CAR BARN! THE CAR BARN! WHERE ARE THE STRIKEBREAKERS FROM MONTREAL?" The crowd flooded into Market Square again, setting the overturned cars ablaze but pulling fire alarms simultaneously. Firemen quickly extinguished the flames without hindrance. "WE'LL FIRE THE SHEDS THEN!" someone shouted, and several hundred men and boys made their way through the darkened streets to the Wentworth Street car barns. Much to their surprise, their stones and bottles provoked a return volley of buckshot. In the unlit barns some 20 Pinkerton detectives from Boston and 15 Thiel detectives from Montreal, hired by the company to break the strike, readily defended themselves. The rioters quickly retreated. By then it was about midnight and most of the crowd apparently drifted home. No disturbances occurred on the West Side, although the company maintained a large car barn there.⁴⁹

With the Dragoons' failure to restore "law and order", city officials decided to call up the militia. After reading the Riot Act Mayor Frink went to the city hall and then to the police station. When the lights went out he hired a "high powered automobile" and raced to the far side of Courtenay Bay where the militia commander lived during the summer. Nearly 500 troops were called to duty by Colonel J.L. McAvity and within a few hours they began arriving at the armoury. At about 3 a.m. they took up their stations; by then the street lights had come on since the damaged dynamo was easily repaired.⁵⁰

All was quiet when dawn broke over Saint John on the morning of July 24. Powerhouse workers began sweeping out a "small carload" of stones and bricks. A repair trolley ventured out to the charred and overturned cars but returned to its shed a half-hour later, leaving the wrecks undisturbed. Later that day a police guard appeared and the cars were righted and towed back to the barns. By 6 p.m. the broken glass and debris had been swept up. Businessmen inventoried their merchandise and counted broken windows. Apart from a few of the latter, they had little to report, for virtually nothing had been stolen.⁵¹ Nevertheless, newspapers concluded that the city's reputation, as well as some glass, had been

48 *Ibid.* In *The Private City* (Philadelphia, 1968), p. 129n., Sam Bass Warner, Jr. observes that eighteenth-century Londoners customarily lighted candles as protection against the mob, while Greg Kealey has suggested that they may have indicated support for the crowd.

49 *Ibid.* The detectives left Saint John on the night of 25 July; *Daily Telegraph*, 27 July 1914.

50 *Evening Times-Star*, 24, 25 July 1914.

51 According to the *Globe*, 24 July 1914, the crowd stole "several bottles" of liquor from a wholesale store on Dock Street. However, the *Evening Times-Star* asserted that nothing had been taken: after the lights went out a policeman prevented a break-in and although the crowd had already broken several bottles with thrown stones, it did not steal unbroken stock. In succeeding weeks the newspapers did not report additional evidence of stolen goods, undermining

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shattered. "Is it possible that this could have occurred in St. John?" they asked in disbelief. Lieutenant Stethen nursed his black eye, broken nose and "greatly disfigured" face, reiterating how lucky the "mob" had been to escape without serious injury.⁵²

On the second day of the strike the threat of violence had by no means dissipated. The strikers blamed the riot on the failure of Crothers to mediate the dispute. Although they had not joined the riot, they called off further parades and announced their willingness to accept any "reasonable and fair offer" from the company. "There is at the present time no chance for settlement", Hopper countered, adding that the rioting had "gone a long way" to prevent the company from "arranging" a settlement.⁵³

Once the militia had been called out, politicians could not stand idly by, for Ottawa required municipalities to reimburse the federal government for all active duty costs, estimated in this case to total \$1,000 a day. The two prominent provincial political leaders from Saint John, J.D. Hazen and William Pugsley, along with John B.M. Baxter, the city recorder, met throughout the day with both sides. Still, the St. John Railway Company refused to rehire Local No. 663's leader, and the strikers would not budge until Ramsey's future was secured. As dusk approached a worried Mayor Frink ordered bars closed and issued a proclamation asking people to remain indoors. He later noted that his words seemed instead to bring people out into the streets in even greater numbers. Fearful storekeepers ordered their clerks to remain after closing to provide fire protection. At 8 p.m. Colonel McAvity gave each of the 62nd Fusiliers 25 rounds of ammunition and stationed them at the court house, the power house, and the car barns. McAvity kept the 28th Dragoons in reserve at Barrack Green, saddled up and armed with combat swords. In distant Halifax troops had been alerted and placed in readiness.⁵⁴

A large crowd of men and women began once again to gather on King Street and soon filled it from curb to curb. At about this time the company decided to restore trolley service, using strikebreakers as crew. Company president Hugh McLean ostentatiously rode the first car out of the barns but few citizens seemed anxious to join him. After dark some cars were stoned as they descended King Street, and their crews promptly abandoned the cars when the militia refused to move against the crowd. The two stalled cars were escorted back to the sheds by soldiers who held the crowd at bayonet point. Trolley service ended abruptly at 10 p.m. For most of the evening the soldiers stood in broken ranks, talking, sing-

Albert Whipple's later recollection of the crowd stealing food, tobacco, and other merchandise. See Whipple Interview, NBM.

52 *Evening Times-Star*, 24 July 1914.

53 *Ibid.* Mosher told Halifax reporters that the strikers had been kept locked up in the Odd Fellows' Hall "and I had the key in my pocket": *Morning Chronicle*, 27 July 1914.

54 *Evening Times-Star*, 25 July 1914; *Daily Telegraph*, 25 July 1914; *Standard*, 29 July 1914.

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ing, and smoking cigars donated by the mayor. According to one reporter the crowd appeared to be in an ugly mood, but others thought that both soldiers and the crowd exhibited restraint. Feeling cut off from all the “excitement”, the reserve soldiers stationed at the armoury established flashlight contact with the troops at Fort Howe who guarded the ammunition. But neither contingent had any news for the other, and both soldiers and civilians waited uneasily for the outcome of the negotiations.⁵⁵

Finally Ramsey broke the deadlock. He resigned as president of the union local and accepted a “life-time” position with the city public works department which had been offered by Baxter. The St. John Railway then promised to reinstate the remaining men, save two whose cases would be heard by the board of directors. The company also promised not to discriminate against union members and to investigate any future charges made against its employees, who were now guaranteed a right of appeal to the directors. The street railwaymen ratified the agreement at 11:30 p.m. As word spread throughout the city, tensions eased and people headed home. Trolley service returned to normal early Saturday morning and the victorious motormen and conductors received a “hearty reception” from patrons. “Thank God it is over”, Mosher declared, adding “I hope I may never have to come back to St. John for another street railway strike”.⁵⁶ Baxter won considerable public acclaim: his photograph was projected on the screen at the Imperial Theatre that night and received warm applause. He later became premier of New Brunswick. The less fortunate Ramsey worked as a city labourer for some months before opening a beer parlor. Within three years he had dropped out of sight.⁵⁷

It had been no ordinary strike in Saint John, for the violent actions of a large crowd had shaped the course of events and dictated the result. Newspaper editors who expressed shock at the presence of a “mob” had overlooked a long tradition of crowd activity in New Brunswick’s port city. A half-century earlier, sectarian conflict had generated notable collective violence. Shortly after the Catholic Irish had landed in Saint John in the late 1840s, they battled Protestants fearful of their own place within the fluctuating timber economy. Blood was spilled in 1849 when Orangemen marched into the Irish quarter on the “Glorious Twelfth”. By the 1870s Orange-Green conflict had become less violent and more ritualized, although Orangemen still armed themselves before marching into the city’s Irish North End. Two decades later thousands of

55 *Ibid.* The *Daily Telegraph* considered the crowd on the second night to have been “nearly as large” as on the previous evening and said that it was made up of citizens “of all classes”.

56 *Evening Times-Star*, 25 July 1914; *Daily Telegraph*, 25 July 1914. Later Mosher said that no one had attempted to persuade Ramsey to resign, but he had decided he could best serve the city “by helping to bring about peace”. Ramsey’s life position was mentioned by the president of the Amalgamated Association in his report to the union’s convention; *MC* 23 (September, 1915), p. 22.

57 *Standard*, 27 July 1914; Saint John city directories, 1914-1920.

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Orangemen could march through the streets without disturbing the holiday atmosphere, and after 1900 the city's Catholics began making annual processions on St. Patrick's Day. Bands played, marchers strutted, and thousands of spectators cheered and otherwise joined in the fun. Marches and parades had become a traditional way to assert a collective interest. When the striking street railwaymen marched through downtown Saint John, spectators "understood" and helped them to repossess the streets from the St. John Railway Company.⁵⁸

Crowd action in Saint John drew upon other "popular" traditions, one emphasizing intimidation and the other illustrating recreational violence. In the 1880s longshoremen jammed the decks of steamers, terrorizing "scabs" who had agreed to work for less than the union wage.⁵⁹ Similarly, the crowd in 1914 intimidated the traction company's strikebreakers as well as some potential witnesses in later investigations. A tradition of recreational violence appears to have sprung up after 1900 at annual New Year's Eve celebrations. Hundreds of citizens began gathering in the streets on December 31st "to watch the excitement and to add to it". Steamers filled the air with blasts from their whistles, rockets were sometimes fired above the West Side, bands always played except in the worst weather, and the crowds "marched". On the night of 31 December 1910, a group of about 500 or 600 people decided to attack a streetcar and removed a fender, smashed a headlight, and broke the trolley pole. Police arrested 14 young males who were not severely punished for the damage, probably because middle-class bystanders seemed to approve the crowd's behaviour by their passive acquiescence. Of course by then the street railway company had become decidedly unpopular. In 1913 an "unusually large" crowd assembled, "ready apparently for whatever might offer in the way of 'fun' ". Nothing happened on that occasion. But the social and cultural traditions of Saint John were such that collective violence against a widely perceived "enemy" was by no means unthinkable.⁶⁰

The Saint John trolleyemen commanded widespread support from the community. Men, women, and children from all classes had become dependent upon the new urban technology and wanted the traction company to be an instrument of public advancement rather than private profit. When the St. John Railway Company persistently behaved in the interests of its investors, both the public

58 On the riots in the 1840s see W.S. MacNutt, *New Brunswick, A History: 1784-1867* (Toronto, 1963), pp. 302-4, 347-9. Newspaper accounts of celebrations on St. Patrick's Day, the "Glorious Twelfth" of July, and Guy Fawkes Day in Saint John were compared for the period from 1875 to 1915. On the Orange Order in New Brunswick see C.J. Houston and W.J. Smyth, *The Sash Canada Wore: A Historical Geography of the Orange Order in Canada* (Toronto, 1980), pp. 69-72.

59 Canada, *Report of the Royal Commission on the Relations of Capital and Labor in Canada: Evidence — New Brunswick* (Ottawa, 1889), pp. 209-10.

60 *Sun* (Saint John) 1 January 1908; *Globe*, 3, 4, 6, 9, 11-14 January 1911, 2 January 1912, 2 January 1913, 2 January 1914; *Standard*, 2-6, 11, 16-17 January 1911.

26 *Acadiensis*

and the politicians grew angry. At this point a deep-seated tradition of crowd action reinforced the developing class consciousness of the trolley men, who adapted marches, bands, and mass demonstrations to the new struggle. While the strikers won important support from organized labour in the city, it was the crowd on the nights of July 23 and 24 which provided the margin of victory over the St. John Railway Company. Led by young men and boys not adverse to violence, the crowd moved purposefully to repossess city streets and to put a temporary end to trolley service.⁶¹ They systematically vented their anger on the traction company by overturning and setting fire to its cars, smashing windows and displays in its showrooms, and shutting down its generators. The crowd's selective violence and intimidating fury intensified public pressure on the company and ultimately forced it to accept the union.⁶²

In the aftermath of the strike and riot the St. John Railway Company began a downward slide. City councillors indignantly refused to pay its \$15,560 bill for riot damages. So widespread was the bitterness against McLean and Hopper that the police were even reluctant to arrest members of the crowd after the riot. Charges of destroying company property were quickly dismissed against those few who were finally brought to trial. Only two young men were "punished": one, an American, was told to leave by the first available schooner, and the other, a city native, was banished for two years. Law and order advocates were easily mollified by the retirement of police chief W. Walker Clark. Wartime inflation drove up the cost of labour and materials, resulting in a steady deterioration of street railway service, roadbed, and rails, and the company was sold finally in 1917 to another local syndicate. In contrast, Local No. 663 became one of the best organized units in the city and welcomed the company's new owners in 1917 because they were said to be "experienced" in labour relations. Decades would pass before people recognized that urban transit systems could not be operated at a profit, and in retrospect the strike and riot played a minor role in the trolley's steady decline.⁶³

61 Although Whipple states that two male "agitators" made half-hour speeches which stirred the crowd to violence, none of the four accounts in newspapers mentions them. It seems likely that Whipple's memory blended the riot events with "free speech" campaigns waged in the city by a handful of socialists during the summers of 1912 and 1913.

62 In Saint John and other smaller cities during the early stages of industrialization, workers could rely occasionally on support from the middle class during their struggles with capitalists. Such cities were still dominated by wholesale merchants and small retailers; industrialists like McLean had secured only a toe-hold and lacked full acceptance or legitimacy. In Saint John as in Herbert Gutman's Paterson, New Jersey, industrialists had not yet dominated the political structure and the new working class, "not entirely detached from the larger community, had significant ties to that community which strengthened its power at critical moments". See Herbert Gutman, "Class, Status, and Community Power in Nineteenth-Century American Industrial Cities", in *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America* (New York, 1976), p. 237 and *passim*.

63 Three of those arrested for rioting were natives of the city; one was the deaf-mute and the other a local youth known for his boxing prowess. The remainder were from the USA (2), England (2),

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The outbreak of war minimized any shock to the community resulting from the collapse of public order. Trolley men volunteered for active service in units commanded by McLean and McAvery.⁶⁴ Headlines concerning Sarajevo, the Kaiser, the British fleet, and Belgium drove Saint John's labour troubles out of everyone's mind. Within a year the streets resounded daily with the tramp of marching soldiers. Hundreds of the city's young men were shipped to France and succumbed to the "primitive savagery" of trench warfare, although the city's newspapers did not use those words to describe violence on behalf of King and Country. A surge of patriotic emotion obliterated any public references to the strike and riot. But private recollections undoubtedly persisted and reinforced the determination of Saint John's workers during a new round of struggles with employers after the war.

and Australia (1). The trial record for *The King vs. Percy Warren et al.* can be read in St. John County Court Record Book No. 4, 1 September 1914, pp. 335-6, 9 September 1914, p. 338, NBM. See newspaper accounts of the trial in *Globe*, 25 August, 1, 2 September 1914; *Daily Telegraph*, 26 August 1914; *Standard*, 26 August, 2, 3 September 1914; *Evening Times-Star*, 1-3 September 1914. A formal inquiry blamed the police chief for doing "nothing whatever to deal with the situation beyond trying to communicate by telephone with some of the officers of the Militia and with two or three policemen"; "Report of Commissioner W.B. Chandler in Reference to the Police Dept. of Saint John", *Common Council Minutes*, (Saint John), 2 December 1914, Provincial Archives of New Brunswick.

⁶⁴ Volunteers for the first contingent had been "good soldiers during our recent strike", and by mid-1917 more than 700 recruits had been drawn from the Saint John labour movement. *MC 22* (October, 1914), p. 28, 25 (August, 1917), p. 15.