

CHAPTER 2

1896-1939

*Nationalisms and
Canadian Autonomy*

PART 8

Labour movement

Why did the first labour unions emerge in Québec and Canada?

- At the start of the 20th century, a major increase (↑) in the **working-class population** was caused by:
 1. rapid industrialization
 2. urbanization
- The **creation of unions** helped **workers to stand up for their rights**.



Working conditions (early 20th c.)



Difficult working conditions:

- Low salaries (working 10h/day, 6 days/week)
- Abuse by foremen
- Lack of job security (no retirement plan, no insurance)
- Child labour
- Unsanitary and unsafe work sites.

Unions tried to find solutions to these problems.

For example, by pushing the Government of Québec to create a free and compulsory education system.

Unionization

1. American unions

- ran affiliate unions throughout Canada.
- the **language barrier** stopped them from establishing a presence in Québec.



Unionization

2. Catholic unions

- tried to:
 - improve conditions for workers
 - limit American influence
 - prevent union dues from being used by non-Catholics.
- *Canadian Catholic Confederation of Labour (CCCL)* created in 1921.
- represented $\frac{1}{4}$ of unionized workers in Canada.



Strikes

- Definition: *a refusal to work organized by a body of employees as a form of protest, typically in an attempt to gain concessions from their employer.*
- **High tensions between employers and workers** resulted in a large number of workers' strikes.



Strikes



- **Employers had the upper hand:**
 - They could lock out or fire their employees at will.
 - They could call in *strikebreakers* or *scabs* (people paid to replace striking workers), rendering the strike action ineffective.
 - They could call in the police or the army to intervene.
 - Sometimes, the government would take their side.
- Strikes often ended in **violence**.

Strikes

Winnipeg General Strike and “Bloody Saturday”

- On May 15, 1919.
- About 30,000 Winnipeg workers went on general strike for better wages and working conditions (display of solidarity).
- The federal government supported the employers. It arrested union leaders (Fred Dixon, J.S. Woodsworth).
- One month later, soldiers occupied the streets, injuring several and killing two people.
- Following this violent repression, workers ended the strike.



Labour legislation

- **In 1900, the Canadian government:**
 - created the Department of Labour to legislate labour relations.
 - passed a law that gave workers the right to strike following an unsatisfactory conciliation process.
- **In 1944, the Québec government passed the *Labour Relations Act*:**
 - to force employers to negotiate in good faith if 60% or more of their workers were in favour of unionizing.
 - to avoid delays in wartime weapons production (WW2).