Creating a Forum for Working-Class Histories: Labour / Le Travail

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Introduction¹

Labour/Le Travail's (L / LT) continuing existence as a vital academic space for academic articles, debate, and intellectual engagement is testament to the lasting impact of the political ferment of the 1960s and 1970s. Although the journal has changed substantially over time in terms of its content and mode of presentation, it was born amid the intense social agitations and the re-thinking of scholarly priorities characteristic of the late 1960s and 1970s. Academic journals are products of both the intellectual/academic trends of the society from which they evolve, factors that exist in reciprocal, mutual determination, and shift over time. As noted Australian historian Verity Burgmann (2002) put it when reviewing L / LT's history, "labour historians write history but not under conditions of their own choosing" (p. 73).

Organizational history

The early organizational development of the journal was relatively straightforward. The Canadian Committee on Labour History (CCLH), originally founded by Irving Abella and David Miller, met at the 1973 annual Canadian Historical Association/Société historique du Canada conference, where a discussion about the communication and dissemination of labour history ensued. A CCLH subcommittee was created to explore the idea of a journal, composed of Senator (and former research director of the Canadian Labour Congress) Eugene Forsey, academics Irving Abella, Greg Kealey, André Leblanc, and Gene Homel. As this idea percolated, a more informal newsletter on labour history was already in circulation, edited by Irving Abella and David Miller;

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this later evolved into the *Bulletin of the CCLH*. Drawing on the crucial support of Eugene Forsey, the CCLH secured a \$5,000 grant from the federal Department of Labour to initiate a new journal. Measured by today's "impact factors," the \$5,000 was well spent, jumpstarting an endeavour that continues to have a considerable impact on scholarship in Canada and internationally.

The first editors, Greg Kealey and Jim Thwaites, represented two of the constituencies behind the new project: a historian of the "new" labour history, and an industrial relations expert at the Université du Québec à Rimouski. Early support for the journal came from Dalhousie University, where Kealey had a position in the history department. Under his editorship, the journal underwent a transition from an annual to a semiannual publication in 1980, and began to incorporate features from the *Bulletin of the CCLH*, such as book reviews. A book review editor, Bryan Palmer, named by the editorial board in 1981, oversaw book reviews for the next fifteen years. (The *Bulletin* ceased publication in 1979.) The original name, *Labour / Le Travailleur*, had an unintentionally masculinist connotation in French. When brought to the attention of the board in 1984, it was altered to the more appropriately gender neutral *Labour / Le Travail* (L / LT).

The journal flourished in a relatively supportive institutional-academic climate. On the one hand, universities recognized the critical importance of scholarly journals to the dissemination of research, and saw some reputational benefit to having journals and editors situated at their institution. When Kealey moved to Memorial University in Newfoundland in 1981, taking the journal with him, the administration provided support staff, internships (what we now call the training of highly-qualified personnel or HQP), and financial support through course releases. This administrative mindset seems less the case now. There is emphasis on the "professionalization" of journal editing (as operations are given to private publishing empires) and universities are more parsimonious about, even opposed to, supporting academic journals and their editors (certainly the case of my own institution). Second, the journal benefitted from the support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Scholarly Journals Program, starting with its first application in 1978. The journal's impressive track record - publishing in both official languages, critical peer review, international recognition, and other factors - has resulted in successive grants, which have been fundamental to the journal's longevity and stability.

There are at least four other factors that sustained and shaped the journal. First is L / LT's relationship to its "base." *Labour / Le Travail* is sponsored by the CCLH, which meets annually at the Congress of Humanities and Social Sciences and elects an executive at that meeting. The editor, elected by the journals' editorial board, provides an annual report to the CCLH (CCLH membership simply being a subscription to the journal), and sits on its executive. This has kept the journal connected to a concerned group of academics with a regular reporting mechanism outside the editorial board.

Second, in the 1980s, the CCLH embarked on other publishing activities that advertised and supported teaching and research in labour history: the *Bulletin of the CCLH*, with news and reviews, ran concurrently in the early years of the journal; a CCLH book series was initiated by Greg Kealey, and later, after the move to Athabasca

University Press in 2007, the press itself began a new labour monograph series in 2011. The CCLH book series, overseen by a committee of the CCLH chaired by Kealey, included oral histories, biographies, collections of documents, and sometimes essays of public addresses for a general audience. These publications did not necessarily compete with university presses but rather supported the general project of preserving workingclass history in Canada, and in the process, helped to sustain the CCLH through some modest book sales and by maintaining its scholarly and public visibility. When labour history was more popular in universities in the 1970s and 1980s, the publishing momentum was easier to maintain, but the book series is still alive, with 27 books still available in print from the Athabasca University Press.

Third, while the editorial board rotates its members every number of years, the editorship has been remarkably stable: Greg Kealey was editor for 21 years; and after him, Bryan Palmer for 17 years. Arguably, there may be a downside to such stability, as the regular rotation of editors also means the infusion of new ideas and intellectual directions. However, the continuity of editors did ensure continuity of expertise, commitment, and resources. Resources came first from Memorial, and later from the Canadian Research Chairs (CRC) program, as Palmer edited the journal as a Tier I CRC in Canadian Studies at Trent University and used his Chair to help sustain interns and other supports for the journal. Moreover, the journal looked to the CCLH and the editorial board for regular feedback and ideas. The editorial board, which assumes a significant share of the assessment of manuscripts, grew in size over time as effort was made to extend the regional, thematic, and theoretical reach of journal submissions.

Fourth, over time, the journal has shifted its offerings, but consistently provides a range of choices for readers, including those only tangentially interested in working-class history. As well as creating a broad-ranging political and theoretical climate for debate - discussed below - there were many different modes of the presentation of material. On the one hand, there have always been feature articles, usually substantive, lengthy, deeply researched essays that are both empirically grounded and are situated within interpretive trends in the field (and while some journals offer only short pieces, L/LTdoes not have such a rigid policy). Over time, other sections were added: Research Notes, Notes and Documents, Controversies, Review Essays, Book Reviews, and in 2000 a new section, From Other Shores, for essays with a more transnational perspective. Research Notes, for example, are shorter pieces, still peer reviewed, but they focus on narrower research or methodological topics, while Controversies provides an opportunity for people to air interpretive differences of both a historical and contemporary nature. In an homage to the journal at the time of its fiftieth issue, influential American historian of race and labour David Roediger (2002) praised the creative reach of the journal, pointing to "seven reasons to celebrate L/LT_{i} " including the journals' publication of working-class poetry, critical debates, including about divisions within labour, extended review essays, and of course, L/LT's attention to Canada's bilingual character.

The latter is also a reason for L / LT's longevity and success. Canada does not have a large academic milieu to generate articles (in comparison to the U.S.), and there is no exact, similar francophone labour history journal in Canada. *Labour / Le Travail* has

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Scholarly and Research Communication

VOLUME 9 / ISSUE 1 / 2018

thus become a publishing venue for both language groups. Indeed, in part due to its origins in the 1970s, L/LT saw the dissemination of articles in both languages as a key political and intellectual goal. Whether Québec scholars see this as Canadian conversation or embrace it as a nation-to-nation dialogue, their participation in the journal has been important to its success. Scholars such as Andrée Lévesque, Jacques Rouillard, Jacques Ferland, Denyse Baillargeron, and others, have been visible not only as editorial board members, but also as author-contributors to the journal.

Intellectual influences

The emergence of this journal, and the way in which its founding assumptions continued to shape its evolution, however, needs more historical context. The social and political conjuncture of the late 1960s and 1970s was critical to the emergence of L / LT. Protests about the Vietnam War, civil rights upheavals in the U.S., configurations of the New Left, the student movement, and the women's movements created new interest in a history of the marginalized, oppressed, and indeed of the unequal class relations that underpinned Canadian society, often assumed by previous historians to be a "peaceable kingdom" of accommodation and compromise.

The labour movement, too, saw considerable upheaval, as a wave of sixties wildcats, a rise in workers' militancy, and the new mobilizations of women workers, all indicated. Even as the oil crisis and the first inklings of austerity and neoliberalism became apparent in the late 1970s, many workers fought to keep the small gains of Fordism, or in the case of women and racialized groups, get some access to those gains. The Canadian labour movement grew substantially through public sector unionism and was engaged in fierce debates about nationalism, American imperialism, and Canadian autonomy. These latter debates had a strong impact on Canadian political economy, a parallel and sometimes overlapping area of study that also experienced revival, rejuvenation, and intellectual debate at this time.

Shifts in the social makeup of universities were also important, as the limited democratization of higher education drew in working-class and lower middle-class students, some of whom were more highly attuned to issues of class power and exclusion. Perhaps most importantly, transnational ideas and debates, including New Left ideas, Marxism, feminism, and the emergence of a "new" social history, focused a critical lens on class. Winds of intellectual change, coming especially from the U.K. and the U.S. (two academic worlds with a historically strong influence in Canada), shifted the conversation about both how to write history and what social history, and its related category, labour history, was and should be. Rather than assuming labour could be equated with unions and the labour movement, influential thinkers broadened the term to "working class," exploring not only worker organization, but all the material and cultural expressions of class, all the issues of class relations, in local, regional, and global manifestations.

The work of American historian of labour and slavery Herbert Gutman was an important influence, but no historian was probably more critical to this shift than E.P. Thompson: his innovative *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) shifted the paradigms of social history writing across the world. In the U.S., there was a

reinvention of labour history by scholars such as David Montgomery, Melvin Dubovsky, Alice Kessler-Harris, and David Brody and their graduate students of the 1970s. Traditional studies of the trade union movement – especially American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) unions – were augmented with explorations of class politics, the work process, race, leisure, family life, and gender (and more). In both the U.S. and Canada, advocates of this expanded "new labour history" were also open to Marxist ideas, long marginalized in Canadian academe, and less interested in older anti-communist and Cold War battles that had characterized thinking on the labour movement for decades.

Labour / Le Travail, reflects Bergmann (2002), was "born Thompsonian" (p. 74). True in one sense, but the journal also drew on some existing academic traditions and modes of analysis. For example, authors such as Harold Logan (1948) produced unionfocused, institutional studies of labour, some universities offered industrial relations programs, and a social democratic tradition explored histories of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation / New Democratic Party (CCF / NDP). There was also Marxist scholarship on class relations and labour produced by scholars such as Stanley Ryerson and Clare Pentland (1968; 1981), though their work tended to be marginalized during the Cold War.

Both these older traditions, and newer ones associated with the "new" labour history, were represented on the editorial boards, and indeed, the rigid division between an old and new labour history was always overly schematic. Still, there were creative tensions – if not a few disagreements – concerning the journal's priorities reflecting different understandings of "labour" history. An article on charivaris in the first issue, for instance, was seen as simply outside of labour history by some on the editorial board, but other board members such as the late Robert Babcock, always argued for an expansive understanding of scholarly importance, and those inclinations prevailed, to the benefit of the journal.

At least two other factors had an influence on L / LT's intellectual evolution. One was the simultaneous resurgence of the women's movement, both inside and outside of academe in the 1960s and 1970s. Membership in the CCLH and the Canadian Committee on Women's History overlapped, and feminists, including Meg Luxton, Andrée Lévesque, Veronica Strong-Boag, and Céline St. Pierre were early editorial board members. The number of articles on women and gender was small to begin with, but grew substantially over time. One retrospective of the journal for the millennial issue indicates that writing on women was quantifiably one of the most important areas of growth in the table of contents over both editorships. Other national journals, founded earlier than L / LT, before a feminist resurgence, took more time to throw off the existing "blokism" of their journals (see Burgmann, 2002, p. 78). Similarly, other areas of revitalized study within social history, such as ethnicity, immigration, and regional identity, were also integrated into the journal's offerings.

Although region was one theme explored in the journal, L / LT was not imagined strictly within regional or national boundaries. It was born with a transnational sensibility, long before a transnational "turn" was announced in U.S. labour history

Scholarly and Research Communication VOLUME 9 / ISSUE 1 / 2018

(Fink, 2011). Although the journal focused on Canadian labour studies, an interest in international intellectual debates, comparative labour histories, and a conscious outreach to labour historians outside of Canada characterized L / LT from its inception. The journal became a venue for international historians to publish innovative articles that broached challenges to existing paradigms in social history (see Linebaugh, 1982). The book review section was international in scope, and a joint issue with the Australian journal *Labour History*, co-edited by Greg Kealey and Australian Greg Patmore, featured jointly written historiographic, comparative pieces on Canada and Australia (*Labour / Le Travail*, 1996).

The first editor and book review editor, who both did doctorates in the U.S. and had many academic connections in the U.S., U.K., and Australia, influenced this transnational orientation. It was also a conscious intellectual choice of the journal, reflecting the view that labour history thrived in a collaborative, international process of academic exchange. Of course, even those educated in Canadian universities in the 1970s and 1980s – whether in labour or other areas – were required to read beyond the nation, thinking comparatively in their research, but the journal did much to nurture this international orientation. An international advisory board of stellar names was added to the masthead and, using a research cluster grant, international editors were brought together for a workshop at Trent University to discuss new directions and collaborations in the field. As a result, L / LT is "networked" internationally; one of the current co-editors sits on the coordinating committee for a newly formed Global Labour History Network. Creating international connections has practical payoffs: not only do you have prestigious names associated with the journal that you may look to in the anticipation of precarious times but it can increase your "foreign" readership and enhance a journal's subscription base.

In the manner of all journals, L / LT changed over time, reflecting shifts in the academic and political climates. As new themes and theoretical debates came to the fore, they were reflected in the journal: a special issue on masculinities, articles on environment, and a much-referenced article on homosexuality reflected other growing fields of study that cross over with working-class history. Indeed, the journal has been sustained in less propitious times – discussed below – because it has defined working-class studies so liberally, taking in culture, the history of the left (where it showed more openness than some American labour history journals), family, sexuality, ethnicity, social reproduction, and women, among other topics.

A willingness to allow debate, crossing the boundaries between academic, trade union, and political issues, in the Controversies section also made L / LT a journal of contemporary opinion. Perhaps ironically, its two longtime editors were originally designated "Marxists" yet the journal has practiced a liberal pluralism: all viewpoints must be welcomed and debated with vigour – a view often shied away from in academic Canada. The millennial issue, for instance, invited one of the original critics of the new labour history, Desmond Morton (2000), to reflect on the field. He began by stating he did not share the editor's political views but it was an "honour" (p. 11) to be invited to present his views (still critical of the new labour history).

Sangster, Joan. (2018). Creating a Forum for Working-Class Histories: Labour / Le Travail *Scholarly and Research Communication*, 9(1): 0101285, 10 pp.

There have been difficult issues to face, related to changing academic priorities, technologies of publishing, a change in publishing venue, and a less supportive political climate. If the journal kept its vitality after the late 1980s, it was in part because it became a "crossover" journal, welcoming pieces on social history more broadly, especially those related to new, burgeoning fields of study. But the journal also suffered from the popularity of poststructuralism, crises in and lost hopes for the labour movement, and the proliferation of other journals. The supposed "deconstruction" of class, dismissive claims that Marxism was passé and reductionist, and the trajectory of feminism and other social movements away from class analysis undermined the labour history project. The proliferation of new journals relating to gender and women, sexuality, education, social movements, and many other areas also meant there were more options for scholarly publishing. This represented a positive development and one could argue that L/LT helped such fields by encouraging authors' early publishing in L/LT, but it also meant competition for a small number of articles. Moreover, for those of us who still thought class was not only important but a structural relationship, it seemed ironic (and depressing) that, precisely as unwaged and waged labour in our times degenerated, and global capitalism became more predatory, an interest in work and unions declined. All this meant that the editor had to redouble all efforts to secure articles and keep the journal relevant. Various strategies were used: the journal reaches out to people who present papers at the Canadian Historical Association (CHA / SHC) and other conferences encouraging them to submit; it encourages submissions by graduate students as well as seasoned academics; and it has organized more than one conference to generate interest - and another is being planned.

Changing organization, alliances, and new challenges

When it was no longer feasible to keep the journal at Memorial after Greg Kealey's departure to become Vice-President Research at the University of New Brunswick (UNB), a new home eventually had to be found. Editor Bryan Palmer, CCLH treasurer Greg Kealey, and Alvin Finkel, a longtime editorial board member who was at Athabasca University (AU), worked out an agreement with the Athabasca University Press. It has proven a good home. The press publishes a range of open access electronic journals in various disciplines in the social sciences and humanities. All the press' journals undergo a peer-review process, so AU was already well-versed in publishing processes and had experienced staff that could step in quite seamlessly. *Labour / Le Travail* is now available as an open access journal after one year. Without that protection, the drop in subscriptions would likely be catastrophic, at least in the current funding model.

The creation of journal aggregators has changed the landscape of publishing, and had the benefit of aiding our impact beyond Canada, though it is always difficult to interpret statistics that show people have "looked at" journals online. Certainly, our individual subscribers abroad are small, but internet consultation of the journal is substantial. Undoubtedly the transnational orientation of L / LT from the beginning has helped. Total subscriptions (inside and outside the country), including Canadian Research Knowledge Network (CKRN), stand at 621, but JSTOR download numbers show a high of 8,278 for one month in 2017, with similar stats from Project Muse. Google analytics for one year (2016–2017) reveal an average of 1,160 visits a month to

Scholarly and Research Communication

VOLUME 9 / ISSUE 1 / 2018

the journal's website, with Canadians using the journal the most (67%), but a decent 10 percent and 5 percent of readers are from the U.S. and U.K. respectively. EBSCO shows that over 89,000 L/LT articles were downloaded from its site this past year.

Open access and emerging digital technologies pose some challenges, but we should not overestimate these, nor assume that technology is a magic solution to boosting circulation. New technological additions might enhance the journal's look and offerings, though it is not clear how much for a historical journal. Digital Object Identifier (DOI) and other metadata-tagging technologies can be resource laden to any one journal. The reality is that Canadian journals exist in a limited market due to our limited number of universities, teaching staff, and students, at least compared to many other countries, and the fact that Canadian *historical* research is less known and consulted in other national contexts. (Declining support from the federal government for Canadian studies abroad will likely not help this situation.) Moreover, the number of PhDs employed by universities is dwindling as humanities and social sciences jobs evaporate and new hires are often in the highly exploitative teaching-only category. As jobs disappear, so do courses, including those on labour history. Although one of the most promising subscription groups with very high numbers is graduate students, this might not be sustained over time as they leave academe.

Maintaining a strong intake of submissions is obviously a problem, as labour history is taught less in universities. This may have a cumulative effect, leading to less student interest, fewer graduate dissertations, and fewer submissions. Moreover, in 1976 when L/LT was founded, graduate students were part of a relatively "flat" egalitarian university system in Canada. Now, they face an intense ideology of university hierarchy within Canada (exemplified by lobby organizations representing only the large universities) and there is strong value put – including by granting agencies and personnel committees – on publishing in international (i.e., supposedly more prestigious, non-Canadian) journals. However much these false hierarchies might be challenged, it can be understood why emerging scholars may look more and more to international (usually U.S. and U.K.) publishing venues.

In the face of many contemporary challenges, journals have adopted different coping mechanisms. *Labour / Le Travail* has not followed the route of some other journals that have become one of a "stable" of journals put out either by a very large university press or a private company. Given the reluctance of universities to support journal editors, and the appeal of economies of scale, the benefits associated with this trend are understandable. However, L / LT weighed the pros and cons, and so far, has maintained its own independent publishing model worked out between the CCLH and Athabasca University Press. The editors and editorial board have been somewhat skeptical of the claim that moving journals into the realm of specialized publishing businesses will professionalize them as the editors and staff of L / LT are highly professional, and indeed, the longevity of staff, interns, and editors has facilitated a useful sharing of advice about the production of a journal over time. Also, by maintaining a small operation linked to one small university press, the journal is able to foster a close, direct relationship between the editors, managing editor, and authors. Substantial feedback is given through personal emails and editors work closely with authors on

revising and improving resubmitted pieces. Authors' sole contact is with the editorial staff and the managing editor of the Athabasca University Press, Kathy Killoh. We do not hear the frustrations often expressed with standardized interfaces such as ScholarOne. For many years, the journal also used its independence and ability to contract out some design responsibilities to create a pleasing aesthetic look, including distinctive covers that set L / LT apart.

Nonetheless, faced with concerns about L/LT's future, past editor Bryan Palmer crafted a new working relationship with the recently created Canadian Association of Work and Labour Studies (CAWLS). Numerous labour studies professors and labour activists who had grown frustrated with the lack of space for critical analysis on work and labour, particularly in the social sciences, created CAWLS. That frustration grew out of many of the same tensions that led to the creation of L/LT in the 1970s, as the so-called "contemporary" analysis of work and labour too often fell into a more traditional examination of industrial relations or legal studies. Given these tensions, many of the founding members of CAWLS were open to creating a new society where the critical, historical examination of labour issues could be discussed and championed. Given that two journals, Studies in Political Economy and L / LT, already existed, and the latter had always defined itself within the rubric of "labour studies," it was suggested that a group of CAWLS members join the editorial board, that all CAWLS members receive the journal (replicating the CCLH arrangement), and that the two groups work together to sustain the journal. While L / LT remains primarily focused on labour history, it has always published interdisciplinary and social science writing; indeed, Leo Panitch and Donald Swartz (1984) authored one of L/LT's well-cited articles on the emerging effects of neoliberalism on labour. Similarly, feminist political economists such as Meg Luxon, Anna Porter, and others, have looked to L / LT as a home for important articles.

There are long-standing shared theoretical, political, and intellectual interests between the CCLH and CAWLS that can be harnessed in this productive alliance, now symbolized by co-editors Charles Smith, a political scientist, and Joan Sangster, a historian. Together, we can face not only practical challenges of subscriptions, technology, SSHRC grants, and many other issues but we can also try to ensure the journal's continued welcome and openness to all topics and approaches that relate to labour, class relations, and social life. As noted in Burgmann's (2002) quote opening this article, labour historians write history but always within changing social conditions. Arguably, we would like to see more writing on LGBTQ topics, colonialism and Indigenous labour, forms of unpaid labour (slavery, coerced, indentured), and on the changing gendered and racialized nature of labour in a globalized world. We have not lost sight of our roots, including our efforts to be transnational and address gender issues but we are an emerging concern, always shifting with the academic and political milieu, in our effort to sustain an established reputation for excellence.

Note

1. Keywords: Knowledge dissemination; Knowledge translation; Strategic communications; Knowledge translation practitioner

Scholarly and Research Communication VOLUME 9 / ISSUE 1 / 2018

Scholarly and Research Communication

VOLUME 9 / ISSUE 1 / 2018

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