

A LESSON FOR THE CANADIAN LABOUR MOVEMENT

the artistic woodwork strike 1973



THE ARTISTIC WOODWORK STRIKE

One of the most bitter fights in recent Toronto labour history.

Each day from August 21 to December 3, 1973, workers and their many supporters walked the picket lines in front of the picture frame company's 2 main locations in North Toronto.

The issue?

The right of immigrant workers to organize for a decent union contract.

For 3 1/2 months, Toronto police herded carloads of scabs through the picket lines into the plants.

The results?

119 arrests, a first union contract, and a growing awareness of the need for united action from all of us in the labour movement on the right to organize and the right to strike.

The purpose of this pamphlet is to pass on the experiences and lessons that we learned during the Artistic strike. We hope that this will increase the possibilities for united action in the future.

A discussion with two union members who have worked at Artistic for a few years, makes up a major part of this pamphlet.

This pamphlet was
produced by the
Right To Strike Committee
in Toronto (See inside back
cover)

the beginning

Artistic Woodwork is not unlike most of the 5,500 small unorganized plants in Toronto which employ mainly immigrant workers from Italy, Greece, Portugal, West Indies, South America, Hong Kong and elsewhere. Bosses in most of these plants enjoy a free reign of day-to-day terror over the workers. They use the workers' language difficulties and fear of deportation against them. They violently oppose any attempts at unionization. The wages are low, the working conditions poor and often dangerous.

The workers enjoy none of the protection a union could provide — job security, seniority, a decent wage and recourse to grievance procedures.

The situation at Artistic fits into this general picture. In December of 1972 Greek workers from Artistic approached the Canadian Textile and Chemical Union to organize the plant. They had first heard of the C.T.C.U. through a unionizing drive at another Toronto plant.

Q. Why did people decide to organize a union at Artistic Woodwork?

1. I think the people wanted a union because they didn't feel too secure and wanted someone to protect them.

Q. And what about wages?

2. As far as that goes — they're still down below the real cost of living.

Q. Had there ever been any talk of organizing a union before this drive?

2. Not that I heard of. I often asked why there's not one here. People wouldn't answer me. They'd just walk away.

Q. Were they afraid to talk about it?

2. Probably. They're still afraid, some of them.

Q. And then during the union drive, is it true that most of the Italians spoke to the other Italians, the Greeks to the other Greeks and so on?

1. Well, we had a committee spokesman, you know. The Italians spoke with each other. And the Greeks with their own leader. And the same with the Canadians. At lunchtime or at night when we finished working with the boss, we talked about the Union and what's happening.

Q. What happened when you started your organizing campaign?

2. The Company knew about it right away.

1. I remember the Company asked if anyone was bothering us outside and then they gave us a 25¢ raise during the campaign. When I came back from Italy, they had started to organize already and the first day I started to work the manager called me into the plant and asked, well, if somebody bothered me outside, you know, and I said nobody bothered me. And so after that I spoke to the other workers and they started to talk to me about the Union and about helping with the organizing.

Q. What else did the company have to say?

2. My foreman was talking to me all the time. He was telling me the Union was no good and all this. He said the workers were getting what they needed now. That's how he was putting it to me. Some fellows close to the Company were telling me the union dues would be \$10 a month. Some said they would be a lot more than that. I just passed that off anyway. I laughed at them.

The first hurdle had been cleared. The Union applied for certification in early March. And despite the Company's lies, the April 10th vote was a resounding YES for the Union. Local 570 of the C.T.C.U. began negotiations in April.

The Artistic management was determined that the Union should have no powers. Months of negotiations resulted in little more than a 65¢ hour wage increase over 2 years (from a previous top wage of \$2.95/hour). Even this amount was a revision of the Company's original offer of 35 hour over 3 years, a revision made in an attempt to persuade the Union to forget about the non-monetary items in the contract. The Company presented the Union with an 'ultimatum' contract on managements rights, seniority, union accountability, and dues checkoffs. To go along with this bribe would mean selling out the workers to the same arbitrary management rule that initially prompted the workers to approach the C.T.C.U.

The major clauses in the contract submitted by the company to the C.T.C.U. were:

1. a **management's rights clause** giving the company the right to make plant rules at any time without negotiations with the Union; the right to discharge workers for violations of the plant rules — no matter how silly the rule — not allowing the worker to grieve the making of the rule only the breaking of the rule.
2. a **union accountability clause** making the union liable for all actions and failures to act by any of its members. For example, the union could be held responsible for damaged machinery and resulting production losses.
3. **no seniority rights**, thereby giving the company the right to discharge older workers in favour of younger ones. As the Union put it, "When in the company's judgment there is any difference in quality between workers, all seniority rights of a senior worker would be abolished completely."
4. **no closed shop and no dues check-off** — by this the company planned to further minimize union strength in the plant.

ACCEPTING THIS CONTRACT WOULD HAVE LEFT THE WORKERS WITH A UNION IN NAME ONLY.

the strike



The mass picket line of November 12.

Q. Why was there a strike?

1. Well, this was a first union contract and the reason we went on strike was because we had asked for our rights. I mean, for job security and not the management's rights the Company wanted. Anyways, that's my opinion ... because we are immigrants and rights are important for the workers. And during the long time we had negotiations with the company, they offered about 40¢ in 3 years. But we refused and after a long, long talk, we agreed on 65¢ and a 2 year contract. But the Company insisted on Management's Rights. They refused a decent seniority clause and union check-off. So we decided to go on strike. Before we went on strike, we had a general meeting when the workers voted. A big majority. They wanted to strike.

Q. Was there a majority of the workers from the 4 plants there at this meeting?

1. Oh yes, about 65 per cent. We had 72 people. And there was 71 for the strike and 1 no.

Q. Did the company say much in the factory before you went on strike?

1. Yes. 2 weeks before I remember they gave a leaflet outside. And they gave every person a letter. They said they would give us 35¢ for the first year and 25¢ for the second year and other benefits, you know, but the Union doesn't agree. It's all small things but the workers still don't trust the Company. And I remember ... that the management they left the meeting at the Labour Board and they go back into the plant and they call everybody and make a meeting.

2. Yea. At 4 o'clock. It was the day before the strike. I remember that. Van Zyl was talking about the contract and all this, and they had all intentions of going back to work the next morning if anyone wanted to come back. They were all prepared for a strike. Van Zyl said he had all the police protection if anybody wanted to come through to work. He had it all planned out.

Q. How did people react in that meeting?

2. Nobody opened their mouth. If they'd opened them they would have been laughing.

1. One week before the strike, the Company gave out a leaflet about what a strike means. They gave this in many languages. And the leaflet said "ONE WORKER TO ANOTHER". They said, "if you go out on strike you lose a lot of money", "Everybody loses", "It will take so much time and we're not sure if you win." And they had some pictures too of the Brantford strike at Texpack. In the picture they have the cars going in the plant, and the police, well, they stopped the picketers.

The strike began on August 21, in the middle of the worst heat wave to hit Toronto in many years. The strike would not be won easily.

It was a strike for a first contract. The Artistic workers were isolated in four small plants in 3 locations. As immigrant workers, newly organized into a union, the Artistic strikers had no history of fighting together. They had little experience with the courts, the police, the Labour Board. All of which they now faced head-on.

The boss had already shown that he was prepared to use any means necessary to destroy the union. Using his skill in dividing the workers, he developed a core of 20 to 30 workers who would defend the company's interests.

When the strike began, the Artistic workers and close union supporters walked the picket line. From the beginning, scab cars entered the plant with police escorts. The strikers had a choice. They could follow the pattern of so many small factory workers — that is, maintain a token picket line and gradually fade out of existence; or they could develop a militant picket line as the center of a vigorous strike effort that could build support around the political issues at stake. The Artistic workers chose the latter route.

Q. What happened on the first day of the strike, August 21?

1. mm..., I came later. When I went on the line at about 11 in the morning, we had most of the people who voted to go on strike, walking back and forth.

Q. Did a lot of people go into work that first day?

1. No. The people, they voted to go on strike.

Q. Did they bring in scabs right from the beginning?

2. Oh yeah, the first morning.

Q. Were they new people they hired?

1. Well, they brought in new people the week before the strike, some South American guys but not too many. The West Indians and East Indians came right after the South Americans.

Q. Why do you think the Company didn't hire more Greeks and Italians?

1. Well, they brought in the Union. They have a leader to speak with them and they trust their leader. And the Italian workers — this is only my opinion — they started to understand what a Union means. It means some security. They have somebody to fight for them. So they don't hire them in the plant. And the same for the Greeks and some of the other nationalities.

Q. What happened after the first week?

1. Some of the workers, they start to be scared. They're scared they won't find another job. And the boss was there all day in the window watching all the workers. Maybe somebody phoned them and convinced them to go back to work.



Q. Did many people who went out on strike in the first place, go back into work?

2. About 4 or 5.

1. 10 maybe

Q. What happened to the rest of them?

1. The rest have real problems. They can't wait for 3 and 1/2 months and they go to find other jobs. Most of the people are immigrants and they can't lose too much money. They wait for 1 month and they leave the picket line but they don't want to go into Artistic.

Q. Why did others stay?

1. Because they understand what it means to have a Union. What it means to have a good contract.



In the early weeks of the strike, the police tried to intimidate the strikers into an early defeat. As they herded scabs into the plants, they attacked and arrested several workers and union organizers. But the result was not the desired one. In fact, the picket line began to grow longer, both in militancy and numbers.



Q. Why did people get arrested?

1. The people got arrested because we tried to stop the scabs, so the police protected the scabs and started to arrest the people for nothing.

2. We were protecting our own rights that's the way I look at it

Q. How did the workers react?

1. I felt angry. We have a right to stop the scabs to talk to them because those are our jobs. I don't see clearly why the police help the illegal workers.

Q. Have any of the workers been on strike before?

2. This is my first time. But of course, I knew all about them. I knew what I was heading for.

Q. Do you think most of the workers knew what it would be like, knew about the police?

2. I don't think so. They felt real bad, though. I know once I saw scabs going in, there was a lot of trouble ahead.



As word of the strike spread — through the daily press, student newspapers, community groups and unions — more and more people

made their way to the early morning picket line. Teachers, students, trade union militants, ethnic groups, community organizations, city aldermen and women, and others. All walked the picket lines. They supported a strike fought around basic working class issues. The strike took on a significance that went far beyond the particular factory involved; the workers and their supporters at Artistic were fighting for basic rights for unorganized, immigrant factory workers, who make up a large percentage of the working population of Toronto.

On some days, when numbers swelled to 100 then to 300 people, the scab cars entering the plant were slowed down considerably. But they were never turned back. The police escort saw to that. On other days, the numbers were disappointingly small: on several occasions police outnumbered picketers. For the workers, the rises and falls in support were very discouraging. They knew that numbers were very important in a strike like this, especially numbers from the organized labour movement.



Q. When did you start getting support on the picketline?

2. When the police started getting rough.

1. But the small groups of supporters came early. We had at least 50 workers then. But after, when we started to lose people, we went looking for supporters. We had lots of groups from different communities. From the Italian community, we had Il Centro, A.D.I., and we had some people from West End Assistance. Some workers and individuals too.

2. The University students were good.

1. Also some friends. Mostly I have a lot of friends who know I work there and when they start to know about the Artistic strike, they have a lot of discussion and they come for solidarity with the workers. After we have people from the Greek community too — P.A.K. We have some Waffle groups, some students from York University. Some unionists.

Q. How did the workers feel about the supporters?

1. They take them seriously. When the strike started, they believed it would be for a couple of weeks and then the settlement would be coming. When the Company became more strong than us and we started to lose people, it left only the old workers mostly and they became down and started to believe that we wouldn't have a chance to win the strike.

2. Without the supporters we wouldn't have won. We would have all ended up in jail. This far into the game — there weren't enough of us. Contract and all. We wouldn't have won a thing.

1. When the support started to come in big and we had a big picket line, the workers started to believe again that we had a chance to win.

the strike escalates

Efforts to gain further support were growing on a number of levels:

- On October 20th, 150 people demonstrated at the Metro Toronto Police Headquarters on Jarvis Street. Speeches by trade unionists, a sympathetic city alderman, and other supporters emphasized the same points that were being made through placards. They referred to the role of police in strikes: "TO SERVE AND PROTECT WHOM? TO SERVE THE BOSSES, PROTECT THE SCABS".
- Two public conferences were held, one on September 18, the second on November 8. At the second, trade unionists from the United Electrical Workers, Steelworkers, and the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, all pledged their support for the picket line and criticized the Ontario Federation of Labour (their parent body) for its no-action stand on the strike. Jim Buller of the Toronto Typographical Union summed it up:
"It is a fundamental principle of trade unionism that if one worker is hurt we are all hurt. And no matter who is hurt, we must all come to his aid. The Ontario Federation of Labour has failed to encourage this support."
- Public meetings were held on university campuses and with community action groups.
- Leaflets were distributed through local union leaders and at a number of plant gates and offices.
- Telegrams and letters pressuring the provincial government to intervene and settle the strike, were sent by a variety of organizations and individuals.
- A party was held at a U.A.W. Union hall halfway through the strike, both to raise money for the strikers and to raise the morale of strikers and supporters alike.
- Money was needed badly for strike pay and mounting court costs. Local 222 of the U.A.W. in Oshawa raised \$1500 in a one day plant gate collection. The Canadian Association of Industrial, Mechanical and Allied Workers (CAIMAW, a CCU affiliate), the U.E., the U.A.W. local at Massey-Ferguson, the Canadian Food and Allied Workers local P114, the delegates at a C.U.P.E. convention in Montreal and a number of other unions gave help. The Canadian Union of Bricklayers (C.C.U.) raised \$5000.

In short, help in the form of moral support, picket line participation, financial contributions, as well as in a number of other ways, was increasing with each passing day.

At the same time, a secondary line of defence was being developed. The CTCU was pressuring the various Ontario legal and political channels: City council was approached with a request for an inquiry into police actions on the picket line; an appeal to prosecute Artistic Woodwork Co. for failing to bargain in good faith was being processed through the Ontario Labour Relations Board; and requests were made to the Ontario Labour Minister, and eventually to the Premier, to intervene in the strike to reach a settlement.

Artistic

Sul comportamento della polizia chiesto un intervento politico



Dave Monie, Bill Tempe, Sarah Spink e Kent Rowley presidente della Canadian Textile and Chemical Union.

(Foto Corriere-Stocco)

TORONTO — Il presidente della Canadian Textile and Chemical Union, Kent Rowley, ha tenuto ieri una breve conferenza stampa nell'austero androne di Queen's Park prima di presentare ad alcuni parlamentari del New Democratic Party quello

cora gagliardo " non mi vedo mentre picchio un agente di circa 220 libbre. ... "

Presente alla conferenza vi era anche un esponente della United Electrical Workers Dave Monie anch'egli arrestato durante i disordini, il quale ha esordito con:

discendenza della polizia e delle autorità giudiziarie nei confronti dell'investigatore privato.

"Se un sabotatore riesce ad infiltrarsi in una fabbrica di 120 persone come e' l'Artistic, quanti sono i sabotatori che lavorano ormai nei grossi complessi?"

A C.T.C.U. press conference asking for a judicial inquiry into police actions at the Artistic picketline.

the turning point

The strike, although it had not succeeded in stopping production, was hurting the company economically. The most skilled workers, the finishers, were all on the picket line.

But the strike was no longer just a fight between the company and the strikers. On one side there were the Artistic bosses, the anti-labour law firm of Mathews, Dinsdale and Clark, the police and the provincial government. On the other, the strikers, their Union and supporters.

DAVIS GOVERNMENT REFUSES TO INTERVENE

On September 25, the C.T.C.U. sent the following telegram to Fern Guidon, Minister of Labour:

"Respectfully request you as Minister to intervene with Labour Board to compel anti-labour company to fulfill legal obligations or face consequence by enforcement of labour laws."

The government received similar telegrams from broad sections of organized labour and other strike supporters during the next few weeks. Violence intensified, arrests continued, the Company refused to return to the negotiating table, but the Labour Minister refused to intervene saying:

"As you know feelings are running high at this time and place, and if the politicians would get out of it, and other people as well, our professionals are ready to move in."

The Government's position was clear. 'Just wait long enough and support for the strike will fall off'.

LABOUR SUPPORT GROWS

The union on strike, the Canadian Textile & Chemical Union is an independent Canadian union, affiliated with the Confederation of Canadian Unions (CCU). It is not well-liked by the top leadership of the CLC - AFL - CIO, the 'official' trade union movement, with its big and powerful American-based 'internationals'. The 'business union' philosophy of many union leaders serves to prevent working class solidarity and for a strike waged by the C.T.C.U., they would be even less inclined to give the active labour support necessary to win such a strike.

From the beginning individual rank and file and some local unions had supported the strike, while the official labour bodies had done nothing. But with increasing pressure from the rank and file and daily media coverage, the official labour bodies could no longer ignore the strike.

- On November 12, the Ontario Federation of Labour Convention opened in Toronto. That morning a large number of delegates swelled the picket line number to 350. In the action that followed 120 police made 12 arrests.
- On November 13, a group of delegates at the O.F.L. Convention distributed a signed leaflet urging support for the Artistic strikers. They pledged to support the C.T.C.U. on the picket line the following morning.
- November 14. The most militant mass picket line of the strike. With tightly linked arms the 300 picketers managed to withstand the police for 30 minutes. The 15 arrests included a number of trade unionists.

TORONTO STAR SEPT. 13, 1973

Council tells police to avoid provoking picket line violence

Toronto City Council last night urged Metro police to "restrain from any action likely to provoke violence" at strikes.

The action arose from a recommendation of Toronto's executive committee after two aldermen complained last week that police were assisting strikebreakers and harassing pickets at a strike at the Artistic Woodwork Co. on St. Regis Cres., North York.

The strikers are members of local 570 of the Canadian Textile and Chemical Union.

Madeleine Parent, a union executive, has charged the company with trying to "bribe" workers with a 65-cent-an-hour increase and a contract which would strip them of seniority rights and

offer no protection against management decisions.

Police Chief Harold Adamson said in a letter to the council's executive committee that complaints about police conduct are being investigated. The executive voted to meet with the chief to discuss the situation.

Public opinion was shifting to support of the strikers.

VIDEOTAPES SWAY CITY HALL

The National Film Board videotapes of the violence and brutality of the police were shown to Toronto City Council. This prompted a number of aldermen to make a plea to the provincial government to end the strike before, as one alderman put it: "Someone is killed".

The Executive Committee from City Hall voted unanimously to call upon Premier Davis and his Labour Minister to intervene. Again a refusal. Guindon claimed he was waiting for 'tensions' on the picket line to cool.

SHOULD WE LET THINGS 'COOL OFF'?

Those more experienced in strikes of this kind recognized the Government's lack of action as another anti-labour move. They realized it was the large numbers and militancy of the picket line that prompted Guindon to even **comment** on the strike. It would only be through strengthening the strike effort that Guindon would be forced to intervene and compel the Company to return to the bargaining table. The supporters would not 'get out of it'.

SUPPORTERS' HELP WINS OUT

The appearance on the picket line of large numbers of trade unionists during the week of November 12 was the turning point in the strike because it achieved 2 things:

1. These trade unionists brought to the picket line not only greater numbers, but workers experienced in strike situations. The result was a greater militancy on the line, and a greater resistance to the attacks of the police.
2. The growing participation of workers from other unions alarmed the politicians. If the strike were to last much longer, solidarity between workers would also grow. IT IS THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH WORKERS' UNITY AND GROWING MILITANCY THAT COMPANIES AND BIG BUSINESS GOVERNMENTS FEAR MOST. THE GOVERNMENT DECIDED TO BRING PRESSURE ON THIS ONE COMPANY (ARTISTIC) IN ORDER TO BEST SERVE THE INTERESTS OF THE VAST MAJORITY OF COMPANIES.

It was for these reasons that on November 15 — more than 2 1/2 months after the strike began and after long periods of broken down negotiations — the Labour Minister finally intervened.

Both parties were brought together to resume negotiations. For the striking workers, it was a major breakthrough. The cost? 35 arrests in that one week of militant picket line activity.



Series of photos showing arrest and assault of Dave Monie, secretary of Brampton Labour Council and U.E. member, at November 14 mass picketline.

Cleric criticizes police action at Artistic

About 145 persons attended a public meeting at a downtown church last night in support of strikers at the Artistic Woodwork Co. plant in North York.

Metro police, who have made 111 arrests since the strike began Aug. 21, were criticized by some speakers after a film was shown of struggles on the picketing. Police escorted workers to the plant, as required to do by law.

Rev. Murray MacInnes, minister of St. Paul's Avenue Rd. United Church, claimed police are destroying the trust Metro residents have in them. The

TORONTO STAR

Don't criticize sympathy pickets'

To the editor of The Star:

Concern has been expressed over the appearance of sympathy strikers on the picket line at Artistic Woodworking Co.

Sympathy strikers should not be condemned for their participation. These people represent those who not only recognize that the rights of the worker have not been realized by plants like Artistic, but who have the conviction to help the cause of the working class.

The hue and cry that the strike is only of concern to those who work at Artistic is absurd. Where even one person's rights are being abused it is the obligation of every citizen to right the situation.

ELAINE CUMMINGS
Toronto

Province steps into

Labor Minister Fern Guindon was to meet today with labor and management in an attempt to bridge the impasse in the Artistic Woodwork Co. strike in North York.

Premier William Davis made the announcement in the Legislature yesterday and said he discussed the matter at a meeting with Toronto

Mayor David Crombie during the morning.

Mayor Crombie had said earlier that the situation at the violence-ridden strike "just can't go on."

Since the strike involving the Canadian Textile and Chemical Workers Union began Aug. 21, more than 100 persons have been arrested on the picket line.

Union leader kicked arrested at Artistic

A postal worker was clubbed and a Bramalea union leader was kicked and arrested today when pickets and police again clashed outside North York's Artistic Woodwork Co.

The violence erupted when carloads of workers tried to drive into the plant on Densley Ave. this morning.

About 250 pickets linked arms to try to stop them, but police wedged a path through them.

Dave Money, president of the powerful Bramalea local of the United Electrical Workers, was kicked in the groin by one constable as three others dragged him to a paddy wagon that was already full. He had disobeyed an officer's order to stay on the street.

Money was one of several

delegates to the Ontario Federation of Labor convention to join members of the striking Canadian Chemical and Textile Union on the 12-week-old picket line.

Val Tociuk, a Toronto postal worker, filed a complaint with police after he was hit.

Artistic strikers

By RON ROSENTHAL

The dust has settled on the picket line at the Artistic Woodwork Co. and the 108 people arrested are now facing the court appearances.

Those up for trial include 16 Artistic workers or union organizers, 55 worker supporters, six retired or unemployed persons, and two artists.

Artistic strife

Oct 13/73 Star

14 DAYS IN JAIL, FINES FOR 2 ARTISTIC PICKETS

Two Metro men were each fined \$200 and sentenced to 14 days in jail Tuesday for common assault while they were picketing the Artistic Woodworking Co. during the three-month strike that ended last week.

Unions want inquiry into Artistic actions

The Council of Canadian Unions has urged Premier William Davis to order a judicial inquiry into Metro police tactics during the recent strike at Artistic Woodwork Co. Ltd. in Toronto.

"We feel we can present evidence of police improprieties," CCU secretary-treasurer Kent Rowley said today after a meeting.

The council formed by 17 Canadian-based unions with 20,000 members, also called for "a real cleanup" of corruption and violence in the Ontario construction industry, the subject of a current provincial inquiry, and asked for a "listening" at the Ontario Relations Board, "as no representative OLRB," and when before it, we find a representative

108 face charges

charge, although common not an indictable offence. Ray Van Eenouge was arrested with mischief spent in Don Jail protesting and he was forced to sign charges were "technicality". A



11-week strike at Artistic Wood reuniting warring union factions

Union can sue Artistic for bad faith in talks

The Ontario Labour Relations Board has given the Canadian Textile and Chemical Workers Union permission to prosecute the Artistic Woodwork Co. for failing to bargain in good faith.

150 strikers picket police headquarters

About 150 persons picketed Metro police headquarters on Saturday to protest police actions at the strike.

the settlement

"We got a first Union contract. Not 100 per cent of what we were asking for, of course. After such a long struggle we couldn't pretend that. Anyway, I think this was a good contract for the first one. Maybe in the future we will have more power and we'll ask for more."

An Artistic striker.

In the days that followed the Government's intervention, the Artistic bosses finally gave in and agreed to the union's terms on the management's rights clause, grievance procedure, union accountability and a seniority system. The Union was compelled to accept an open union shop and no automatic dues check-off. It seemed that an end to the strike was at hand.

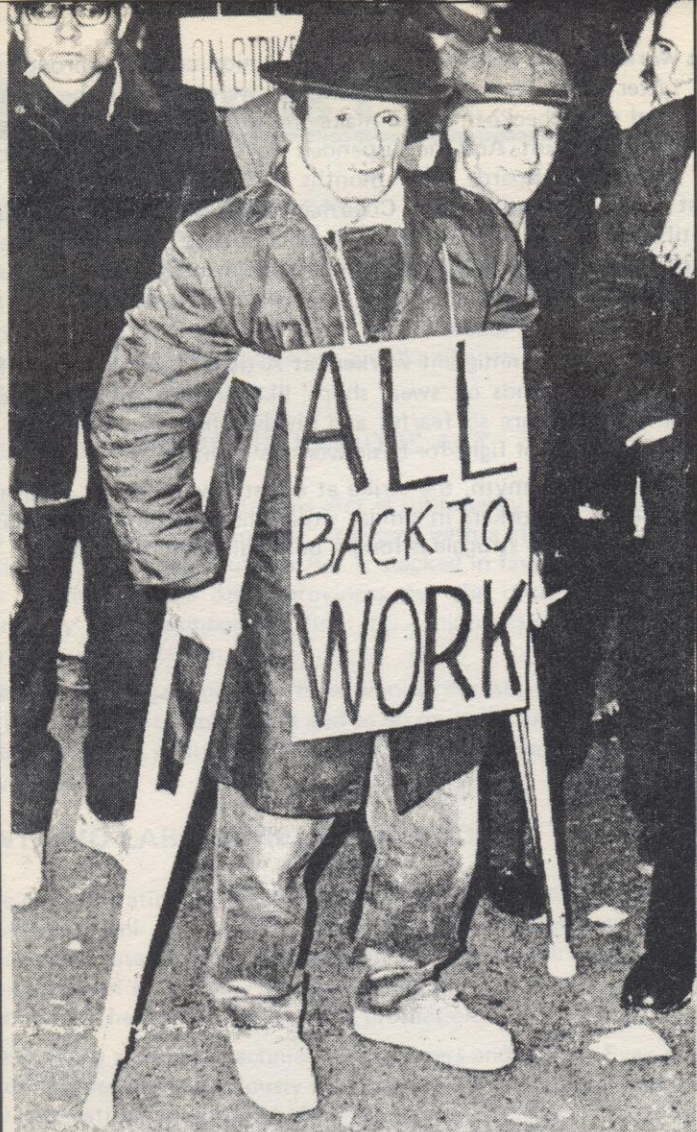
But then the Company insisted that no workers who had (1) been arrested on the picket line (2) taken other jobs to survive through the strike and (3) fallen into the Company's disfavour through picket line activities, would be allowed to return to work. This directly opposed the Ontario Labour Relations Act (Sections 58 & 64).

The Strike was prolonged by another 2 1/2 weeks.

As part of its last-ditch effort, the Company also launched a smear campaign against the Union on TV, radio and in the daily press. The striking workers at Artistic "don't really want to settle", but want to keep on with "confrontation and mob rule". Scabs were interviewed by the media and defended their role as strikebreakers. The Company tried to whip up anti-communist hysteria in its attacks on union leaders and supporters. All strike supporters were labelled as 'outside agitators'.

At the same time, the Canadian Manufacturers' Association (CMA) was busily embarking on its own anti-labour campaign. Keith Rapsey, president of the CMA, appeared on TV, radio and a number of CMA-sponsored affairs, attacking unions, defending the use of strike-breaking companies and labelling strike-breaking "an honourable profession". It was obvious that these activities were in part a response to the solidarity developing around the Artistic strike.

Despite the attempts of both the Artistic bosses and the CMA, support didn't fall off, and pressure to settle was once again on the Company. Finally on December 3, 1973 a collective agreement was signed. The Company agreed to take back all the workers on strike, but reserved the right to suspend the 9 workers who had been arrested. The Union could then take these cases through the grievance procedure to an Arbitration Board. The Company suspended the 9 workers and the Union took the cases to Arbitration.



LUIGI GISMONTI, on crutches, outside Artistic Woodwork plant yesterday. His colleagues claim the firm wants to suspend him even though they say, he has not been charged in connection with picket line clashes with police.

—alex kalnins

Toronto Sun

Nov. 27/73

Firm to suspend charged strikers

The workers at Artistic had won a first Union contract through a long and bitter fight. Not all of the demands were won. Losing the closed shop and dues-checkoff would make the work of building up the local even more difficult. And the suspended workers found no justice before the Arbitration Board. After months of Company delays that drove most workers to other jobs, Chairman Owen Shime said he would sit "until hell freezes over to hear all the evidence". He had turned the Board into a courtroom of legalisms and delays. The Union walked out of Arbitration in June, 1974 and launched a public campaign to expose the injustices of the Board.

Nevertheless, the immigrant workers at Artistic have won a significant victory. In thousands of 'sweat shops' like Artistic, the bosses assume that the workers are so fearful and divided that they will settle for a few pennies and not fight for basic workers' rights.

In destroying this myth, the strike at Artistic will serve as an example to thousands of workers in similar situations; an example of what can be achieved when a struggle is fought politically and militantly.



the lessons I

THE COMPANY'S WEAPONS

Time and time again the Ontario Labour Relations Board, the courts, the police and the laws defended the Artistic bosses. Private property was protected but workers' rights were denied. This has traditionally been the role of these bodies but a strike like the one at Artistic makes the role brutally obvious.

ONTARIO LABOUR RELATIONS ACT

The Ontario Labour Relations Act is supposedly written to safeguard the rights of workers. In fact, it begins with a statement encouraging collective bargaining. But the Act is stacked in favour of the employer. For example, while other provinces put the onus of proof on the Company when someone is fired for Union activity, in Ontario the burden is on the Union.

Even the few legal rights we have won in the Act — including the right to join a Union of our choice and to go on strike and keep a picket line — are denied in reality by the police, the companies, courts, police and government.

ONTARIO LABOUR RELATIONS BOARD

The administration of the Act is handled by the O.L.R.B. We have the Board to thank for many viciously anti-labour interpretations of the Act. In the case of the suspended Artistic strikers, the Board gave a first interpretation of the new Section 64 that meant that only workers who scabbed on their union had any job protection.

The Board is a maze of technicalities, lawyers and delays. Even joining a union has become ridiculously difficult. In '71 and '72, only 550 out of 949 applications succeeded before the Board.

When the CTCU tried to gain consent to prosecute the Company for failure to bargain in good faith, permission was finally given but 2 1/2 months after the plea was entered. In contrast, in a number of strikes it has taken the courts only hours to grant injunctions to companies to restrict a union's right to picket. And even though the CTCU got consent to prosecute, any court-imposed fine would likely be about \$200, the same fine given most convicted individuals arrested on the picket line.

The O.L.R.B. has become a millstone around the neck of the labour movement.

POLICE

There were 108 people arrested on the picketline at Artistic. But only half of the original trials resulted in convictions (and those convictions are being appealed). It has become quite clear that many of the arrests by police were without cause and based on no solid evidence. Most of the arrests on the line were nothing more than a form of harassment and intimidation.

We have a right to do informational picketing, but there was no chance to do that by the time Toronto's "riot squad" was on the scene. There were examples of motorcycle police stopping rush hour traffic on the nearby main street, waving the cavalcade of Artistic salesmen and foremen with their carloads of scabs into Densley Street and then charging at the picket line to break a path for those same cars. The police actually formed a human barrier between picketers and scabs, not giving them a chance to speak.

Early in the strike, the police handed out brochures that quoted legal restrictions on activity but **minus** the exceptions about strikes.

Though at least 12 individual policemen were charged with assault, the top decision-makers and their policies are most at fault. City Council Executive asked to meet with the Police Commission to discuss their general policies with regard to the strike, but the Police Chief refused.

The brutal actions of police against the picket line at Artistic proved they were far from "neutral" in their "peace-keeping".



City Alderman Dan Heap confronting a Metro Police officer who has no identification number below his hat badge. There were many complaints that it was sometimes impossible to identify officers involved in assaults. (Also note the company's cameraman on the factory roof.)

THE COURTS

During the strike, the Justice of the Peace constantly denied picketers the right to lay charges against the police for assault. It was only through determined efforts on the picketer's part that any charges have been laid. To date, the courts have registered no convictions against the police. Technicalities in rules of evidence have made the introduction of crucial evidence like police tapes and TV videotapes almost impossible.

For arrested picketers, it's another story. They are being convicted in the courts on 'criminal' charges (for common assault, mischief, obstruction, etc.) for taking a stand in support of workers' rights. Convictions, heavy fines and jail sentences are being handed out, in the words of one judge "... as precedents to deter those people and others in the future" from joining other picket lines. Judges are ruling defence witnesses to be unreliable and 'obviously biased' and crown witnesses (policemen, strikebreakers) to be truthful and neutral.

PROFESSIONAL STRIKEBREAKERS

"They have quite a reputation for assisting management in matters of this type". That's manager Van Zyl talking about the Wackenhut Company's professional strikebreaking services.

Artistic hired a spy from Wackenhut a few weeks before the strike to try to smash the Union. Ronald Masut posed as a worker and union member. His job was to infiltrate the Union, provide information to the Company and provoke picketline violence. Masut was actually being financed by the Company at the same time that he was encouraging others to get into trouble.

In fact, Masut was easy to spot. He was very provocative on the line and listened in on every conversation. He came early to Union meetings and left late. He always found some excuse to pass through the room when the strike committee was discussing strategy in private.

One of the problems is that our government condones these labour spies. The Ontario Provincial Police gave Masut a licence to operate.

Masut was also given special treatment by the Provincial courts. At his second trial, 3 of the charges against Masut were dropped at the request of the police. Deputy Police Chief Jack Ackroyd coincidentally appeared in the courtroom the day of Masut's trial.

Many states in the U.S. have already banned the operations of these private police. The labour movement must consider action. Not just shelved reports.

The easiest way for a company to bust a union is to provoke a 'first contract' strike. The union's organization may be weak, the employees will be fearful of their jobs, and members will not yet be comfortable and familiar with union ways.

Artistic forced such a first contract strike; encouraged violence on the picketline by bringing scabs through and hiring an "agent provocateur" and stalled negotiations in the full knowledge that the labour laws, the Labour Board, the police and the courts were on their side. They hired a security agent to pose as a striker, knowing he would inform on Union activities.

It takes a strong, unified force to defeat such a combination.



This Man is a Stool Pigeon

RONALD MASUT. WORKER. STRIKER. AND COMPANY SPY.

Masut was hired through the Wackenhut security firm and registered with the Provincial Police as a private investigator.

the lessons II

IMMIGRANT WORKERS IN CANADA

New immigrants have been told that Canada is a truly democratic country where there are still great opportunities to "get ahead". What they are not told is that we must still wage long and bitter strikes to win even the most basic rights. And their expectations of strikes are different:

"In Europe, it's all different. In Italy, when they go on strike, no one goes inside to work. I remember we had a strike a long time ago in my town and after months and months, the workers they lose money and they go inside to occupy the plant. And they live there. They bring their wives and sons because they can't pay the rent anymore. So after this long time, they won the strike. And in the big plants like Fiat, when one plant goes on strike, the other plants go too. A general strike, you know."

But most immigrant workers don't end up in General Motors, the equivalent of Fiat. They work in Toronto's thousands of small unorganized factories, as part of the most exploited section of Canada's working class.

It is no coincidence that some of the toughest strikes fought in Ontario in recent years — Texpack, Toronto Western Hospital, Giddon Mufflers and now Artistic — have involved large numbers of immigrant workers.

"IMMIGRANTS DO LOTS OF THE HEAVY WORK — BUT WHERE'S THE REWARD?"

"IMMIGRANTS DO LOTS OF THE HEAVY WORK — BUT WHERE'S THE REWARD?"

Since Canada began, immigrants have done much of the heavy work: Chinese immigrants built the CPR! Italian immigrants built the Toronto Subway! Immigrants make our clothes and build our houses! And hundreds of thousands of Italian, Greek, South American and Caribbean workers toil in small factories under foul conditions and pay — places like Artistic Woodwork. Is that taught at school! In the newspapers! On TV?"

excerpted from a CTCU leaflet

In starting to organize these small plants efforts must be made to develop immigrant leadership. And all of the nationalities must be represented — at Artistic the Italians were over-represented in the

leadership. It will also be important to develop interpreters within the membership. During the strike, it proved to be a mistake to rely on outside translators.

The growing immigrant population is a potentially militant and politically-conscious addition to the Canadian labour movement. We must help in their organization.

THE NEED FOR UNITY

At first, the divisions between the strikers were hard to overcome — Italian, Greek and Spanish-speaking members had little contact with each other. This situation can lead to conflicts that help the boss but such conflicts were generally overcome as it became obvious that **unity** meant **strength**. As one striker put it after he had just broken up an argument between 2 fellow workers: "We have more important enemies to fight."

THE INVOLVEMENT OF STRIKERS

The best way to develop unity when we are on strike is to be directly involved in planning and carrying out strike strategy and tactics. For example, the more involved Artistic strikers regularly visited those strikers who were not attending the picket line or the weekly Union meetings, urging those workers to become more active in the struggle. But the strike effort was weakened by the Union's failure to develop the membership to play a more central role. For instance, a more complete **informational network** could have been set up to inform, unify and raise the morale of the workers on strike:

1. a weekly strike bulletin put out by the strikers, informing the local's members as well as other trade unionists of the latest developments.
2. discussion groups dealing with strike issues to raise the political understanding of the workers and their supporters.



More of the striking workers could also have been involved in developing picket line tactics, Strike Support Committee activities, press releases, communication with the scabs and the political content of Union conferences and rallies.

That kind of experience is invaluable for teaching us how to deal with the institutions we're up against in this country: it develops our organizational skills; and we develop a practical unity that helps us survive in the plant after a strike.

MILITANT ORGANIZATION

The immigrant workers who make up the largest percentage of poorly-paid factory workers in Canada, are for the most part unorganized. The difficulties involved in organizing the unorganized demands militancy within the Union leadership. The workers found such leadership in the C.T.C.U. This was the same union that won a clear victory at the Texpack strike in Brantford in 1971. They had had experience then with combatting police, injunctions and professional strikebreakers. They were able to mobilize support from the Steelworkers, U.A.W. and Teamsters in the area to bring about the victory.

STRIKE SUPPORT COMMITTEE

The Artistic strike, however, suffered from the lack of effective structures for building and maintaining support. There was the Strike Support Committee which for a time was able to do some important work. But it was less effective than it could have been:

- the Committee included only a small section of supporters and more importantly, few strikers or trade unionists.
- Some members of the Committee played an obstructive role, turning the effort into a debating club. The obstruction came from supporters who didn't understand that it is the striking workers and their Union that must be at the centre of leadership.
- The Union did not give enough clear leadership in the meetings. It left the Committee vulnerable to the obstructive group.

SOLIDARITY

The strike taught us of the need for solidarity among working people. The Artistic workers saw the difference it made when large numbers of trade unionists walked their picket line. The trade unionists shared a common working experience with the strikers and brought valuable strike experience with them. Their appearance also forced the government to intervene.

In any strike we must have a definite strategy for winning and maintaining trade union support. The CTCU and its supporters had more success in gaining such support than most strikes in recent years. However, the support was inconsistent and not a reliable source of support throughout the strike.

Because the question of trade union support was not continually taken up, the most effective kind of support was not mobilized as it could have been.

If a solid core of active trade union supporters had worked closely with the Union from the beginning, these people could have done the continual and steady work that was needed to build and maintain labour support.

USE EVERY POSSIBLE CHANNEL

The strike showed us that we have many allies to call upon and institutions that can be pressured for support.

For example, the media. Although newspapers, TV and radio are owned by wealthy people who, in the long run, will support the bosses, strikes which are fought militantly and which gain outside support can get publicity that will help to win the strike. The CTCU, by holding press conferences and informing the media of new anti-labour activities of the Company, police and courts was able to carry the issues of the strike to all parts of the city and even across the country.

In another area, the Union was able to pressure the different levels of government: City Council was approached with a request for an inquiry into police actions on the line (which was in part responsible for an independent inquiry into the police complaint department set up in May, 1974); the Ontario Labour Relations Board was pressured to prosecute the Company for failing to bargain in good faith; and at the provincial level, the Tory government was swamped by telegrams, petitions and media publicity to intervene in the strike.

Although all these government bodies usually support the Company, the increasing pressure of a growing and militant picket line finally prompted them in turn to pressure the Company to settle.

THE FIGHT CONTINUES

The Artistic strikers have now returned to work in a plant where they are outnumbered by non-union workers. They must carry on the slow and patient work of reorganizing. The boss' attitude is, and will continue to be, very hostile. His attacks on the Union have not let up for a minute.

For the workers at Artistic, in many ways, the hardest work lies ahead.

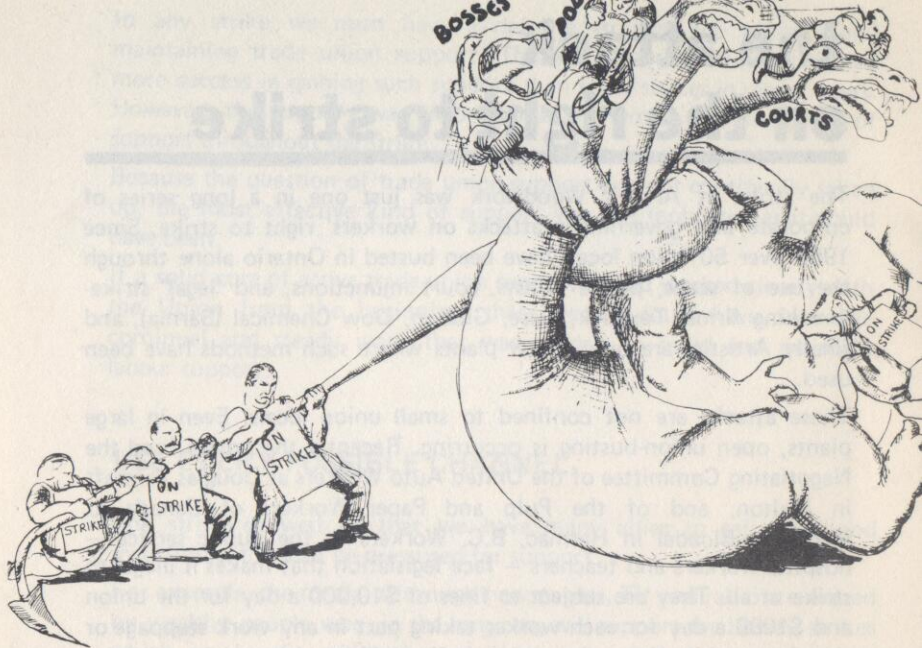
the attack on the right to strike

The strike at Artistic Woodwork was just one in a long series of corporate and government attacks on workers' right to strike. Since 1965 over 50 union locals have been busted in Ontario alone through the use of scabs, police arrests, court injunctions, and 'legal' strike-breaking firms. Texpack, Dare, Giddon, Dow Chemical (Sarnia), and finally Artistic, are only a few plants where such methods have been used.

These attacks are not confined to small union locals. Even in large plants, open union-busting is occurring. Recently the bosses fired the Negotiating Committee of the United Auto Workers at Douglas Aircraft in Malton, and of the Pulp and Paper Workers of Canada at MacMillan-Bloedel in Harmac, B.C. Workers in the public service — hospital workers and teachers — face legislation that makes it illegal to strike at all. They are subject to fines of \$10,000 a day for the union and \$1000 a day for each worker taking part in any work stoppage or slowdown while the contract is in effect. No such penalties exist for managements who let working conditions deteriorate in the course of a two or three year agreement.

In the course of the Artistic Strike, there were many signs of co-operation among the bosses. The Canadian Manufacturers' Association, a 'union' of thousands of large and small capitalists, conducted a vigorous publicity campaign defending strike-breaking in the last month of the strike. The negotiating committee at Douglas Aircraft was fired by the company following incidents arising out of their support for the Artistic picket line. The co-operation between Anning Security Company (a division of Wackenhut of Miami) and the Artistic Woodwork Company was revealed when the CTCU exposed an Anning security guard who had been hired by Artistic to be a company spy among the workers.

But the right of workers to co-operate and support each other's picket lines has come under attack — most notably in the courts. The 'guilty' verdicts and stiff sentences are meant to teach us all a lesson by example. The courts, as well as the government, the corporations, and the police are warning us that active working class solidarity will not be tolerated. The conclusion that they want us to draw from the Artistic strike is quite simple: keep your nose clean and mind your own business.



WE NEED A COMMITTEE TO DEFEND THE RIGHT TO STRIKE

As working people, our conclusions ought to be quite different. It is becoming increasingly obvious that we have to be much better organized to be successful in stopping these attacks.

In the last few years, our official labour bodies have passed resolution after resolution condemning strike-breaking. Many briefs have been presented to the various levels of government on the subject, and even a book has been written. The Ontario Federation of Labour recently delivered a brief to the Minister of Labour criticizing the Labour Relations Act and the Labour Relations Board on such points as injunctions, strike-breaking, compulsory arbitration, and blocks against unionizing drives.

But these briefs have been made before, and the problem has not disappeared — in fact the situation has worsened. IT IS UP TO THE WORKERS IN ALL THE UNIONS AND THE LEADERSHIP IN OUR UNIONS TO ORGANIZE AN ACTIVE CAMPAIGN TO DEFEND OUR RIGHT TO STRIKE.

- Local Labour Councils and union federations must adopt programs of action to implement these resolutions. We must educate ourselves about our common problems, and build a movement that forces the government to listen to our demands.

THE ARTISTIC PICKET LINE (as sung during the strike)

About Artistic Company a tale to you I'll tell.
The only thing they're artists at is giving workers hell.
Who needs the goons from Driver Pool when salesmen do as well?
But the lines go marching on.

Now the force of all our numbers and our actions on the line
Won a victory for the workers, and a contract they could sign.
But while workers are exploited, then our struggle won't decline
So the lines go marching on.

Now I sing of "Metro's Finest" — and the strikes they try to break
With their threats of deportation, and arrests they love to make.
But they bloody well don't scare us, so the war we'll not forsake.
And the lines go marching on.

Solidarity Forever
Solidarity Forever
Solidarity Forever
For the Union makes us strong



RIGHT TO STRIKE COMMITTEE
PAMPHLET No.1. TORONTO