

The Making of a Labour Activist:

James W. Orr, Saint John, New Brunswick, 1936-2009

by

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Abstract

James W. Orr (1936-2009) was one of a number of rank-and-file labour militants in the city of Saint John, New Brunswick who bore witness to, and had some hand in, a number of upheavals in the local labour movement. Growing up in a working-class neighborhood in west Saint John, he came of age at the time of the momentous Canadian Seamen's Union strike of 1949, which had a permanent impact on his outlook. Leaving school at sixteen to work for the Canadian Pacific Railway, he then joined the navy before going on to become a lifelong union man on the docks. As a member of Local 1764, International Longshoremen's Association, he helped lead the 1974 strike against the Maritime Employers' Association. He was one of the organizers of the 1976 Saint John General Strike on 14 October against the federal government's wage controls. Orr was also a key organizer of the 1979 NO CANDU campaign that closed the port in support of civil rights for workers in Argentina. Within the ILA, he helped open union membership for non-union workers on the docks, an effort that cost him his position as a union officer; however, the influx of new blood rejuvenated the ILA and reoriented it in the direction of social unionism. Local 273 went on to replace the archaic shape-up system with a dispatch system while also struggling against the bureaucracy of the international union and for the autonomy of Canadian locals. The object of this study is to rescue Jimmy, or "the Bear" as he was affectionately called, from what the influential social historian E.J. Hobsbawm describes as "the anonymity of the local militant." This study relies heavily upon oral history, including two interviews completed before Orr's death, and his personal papers deposited at the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick.

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List of Abbreviations

ANL	Australian National Shipping Line
ARLEC	Atlantic Region Labour Education Centre
BRAC	Brotherhood of Railway and Steamship Clerks, Freight Handlers, Express and Station Employees
CANDU	Canadian Deuterium Uranium
CAW	Canadian Auto Workers
CCF	Co-operative Commonwealth Federation
CDMC	Canadian Dock and Marine Council
CLC	Canadian Labour Congress
CLMWC	Canadian Labour Marine Workers' Council
CLRB	Canada Labour Relations Board
CPU	Canadian Paperworkers' Union
CSU	Canadian Seamen's Union
CUPE	Canadian Union of Public Employees
DVA	Department of Veterans' Affairs
GDCRA	Group for the Defence of Civil Rights in Argentina
IDC	International Dockworkers' Council
ILA	International Longshoremen's Association
ILWU	International Longshore and Warehouse Union
ITF	International Transport Workers' Federation
MEA	Maritime Employers' Association
MUA	Maritime Union of Australia
NBFL	New Brunswick Federation of Labour
NHB	National Harbours Board
NULPA	(Saint John) Non-Union Longshoremen's Protective Association
SIU	Seafarers' International Union
SJDLC	Saint John and District Labour Council

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Figure 1: James W. Orr (left) alongside Argentina activist Enrique Tabak and longshoreman Ronald McLeod during the 1979 NO CANDU for Argentina protest (Courtesy of the Frank and Ella Hatheway Labour Exhibit Centre)

Introduction

At first glance, the life and times of a rank-and-file longshoreman, a relative unknown beyond the tight-knit circles of his occupation, does not merit much historical attention. James William Orr, or Jimmy to those who knew him, was not a famous labour leader, a great mobilizer of masses or a wielder of political power. Those who admired him said he possessed the necessary faculties and had a “gift,” but in his own words, he preferred merely to be “a soldier” within the ranks of a larger social movement.¹ The object of this study is to rescue Jimmy, or “the Bear” as he was affectionately called, from what the influential social historian E.J. Hobsbawm describes as “the anonymity of the local militant.”² These people, Jimmy included, were not faceless mobs mobilized by the words of greater men, nor mere cutouts of intellectual concepts filled with undifferentiated human mass, but were instead flesh and blood human beings, shaped by their own experiences and responding to them on their own terms.

Such people led complex and interesting lives that are worthy of exploration by historians. James Orr’s impact was evident in his influence upon those around him, and despite his self-professed role of “non-leader,” he, and others like him, functioned as the backbone of many causes, actions and protests. When viewed in isolation, such events may warrant little attention, but when viewed in context they represent a legitimate

¹ Pat Riley, “Eulogy,” May 2010, copy provided by David Frank, 1.

² Eric Hobsbawm, “Political Shoemakers,” in *Worlds of Labour: Further Studies in the History of Labour* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1984), 130.

historical theme and give us insight into the rank-and-file experience of organized labour. In this process they often contradict the mythmaking history of monolithic international unions and provide us with a much more nuanced and human account of working-class experience. In an important collection of rank-and-file labour biographies, Alice Lynd and Staughton Lynd remind us that “most of labor history is created neither by famous leaders nor faceless masses in crisis situations. We believe that the labour movement draws its life from many thousands of committed persons who work, day in and day out for years, to bring unions into being, to resist their bureaucratization, and to better the lives of others, not just themselves.”³ During the course of his life, Jimmy Orr self-consciously modeled himself upon similar premises. One of the documents in his papers is an inspirational mantra, a reflection upon the “the characteristics which the emerging person” would exhibit, including a “firm belief that institutions exist for persons,” “an indifference to material comforts,” a search for “a shared purpose,” “openness... in all forms of leadership” and the belief that power must be sought “for other than purely selfish reasons.”⁴

An exploration of the life and times of Jimmy Orr is supported by Hobsbawm’s premise in *Uncommon People* that it is important to tell the stories and probe the deeply held assumptions and beliefs of such people -- “whose names are usually unknown to anyone except their family and neighbours, and, in modern states, to the offices registering births, marriages and deaths” and sometimes “to the police and to journalists

³ Alice and Staughton Lynd, *Rank and File: Personal Histories by Working-Class Organizers* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), 5.

⁴ “Characteristics which the Emerging Person will Exhibit,” Jimmy Orr Papers, MC3465, Box 2, Provincial Archives of New Brunswick (PANB), Fredericton.

in search of a ‘human story.’”⁵ Orr is mostly absent from larger histories, but he pops up anecdotally in news stories and the recollections of fellow militants and those whose lives he touched. He appears briefly, for instance, in George Vair’s book on the Day of Protest in Saint John in 1976, when he stepped up to “lead protesters over the Harbour Bridge”.⁶ And he also appears in the feature on the 1979 No Hot Cargo protest on the Labour History in New Brunswick (LHTNB) website, reminiscing to a reporter: “All our members, and our members in the future, will be proud of it for the actions we did take on that particular day.”⁷ His likeness can be seen in a memorial painting of the event that is on display at the Frank and Ella Hatheway Labour Exhibit Centre in Saint John, which was based on a photograph taken on that occasion. While Orr was rarely in the spotlight, he was always working in the background in order to strengthen the social movement and ensure that, when boots were needed on the ground, they would be there.⁸ These episodes and anecdotes give us human glimpses into his character, but also raise further questions and warrant deeper analysis. A hint of historicism is in order so that we may analyze further Orr’s experience and outlook, setting these beliefs as well as cultural influences against a materialist backdrop of the period and particular circumstances within which he found himself living and working in Saint John, New Brunswick during the second half of the 20th century and on into the 21st.

⁵ Eric Hobsbawm, *Uncommon People: Resistance, Rebellion and Jazz* (New York: The New Press, 1998), vii.

⁶ George Vair, *The Struggle against Wage Controls: The Saint John Story, 1975- 1976* (St. John’s: Canadian Committee on Labour History, 2007), 113.

⁷ “Hot Cargo,” <http://www.lhtnb.ca>

⁸ Fred Nice, interview by author, Saint John, NB, 6 July 2013, tape recording and transcript in possession of author.

While drawing on a limited amount of secondary material, this study relies largely upon archival materials, including some union documents and contemporary newspapers, and several valuable interviews. The most important single source are Orr's personal papers that were deposited by his daughter at the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick following his death in 2009. Some are official documents, while others are hand-scrawled notes and anecdotes. They contain such materials as records of protests, correspondence with fellow dockworkers and labour activists, political publications, scores of news clippings and quotes, songs and other cultural works that helped shape his thinking. They also include port records, union documents and records of grievances and agreements with employers that give us a picture of material circumstances, how they were changing and how these changes were responded to. These sources give us insight into the range of his activities and how he understood and participated in the world around him. Thanks to the efforts of the Labour History in New Brunswick research team, we have interviews completed with the man himself before his passing, which allow us to see Jimmy on his own terms and in his own words.⁹

Interviews conducted with Orr's contemporaries and colleagues were also extremely valuable: Pat Riley, a Saint John labour leader who counted Orr as a mentor, gives us a closer look at the range of his activities and his sometimes stubborn attitudes, contextualized within the changing nature of port work and industrial Saint John; further insight is gained from Orr's former roommate and collaborator, Fred Nice, who recalls a host of comical yarns ranging from protest activities to a host of drinking stories and

⁹ Jimmy Orr, interview by Carol Ferguson, Saint John, NB, 24 November 2005, Labour History in New Brunswick Fonds, MC3477 MS4A18, Provincial Archives of New Brunswick (PANB).

Orr's quirks and idiosyncrasies.¹⁰ George Vair, a local labour activist and writer, also helps to shed some light on Orr's activities and political career, while providing a few humanizing glimpses into Orr's demeanour.¹¹ These interviews help paint a thoroughly human picture of Orr, allowing us to picture his apartment, complete with his ratty old lazy boy chair, fridge covered in protest stickers and closet full of drying fish -- for Jimmy fancied himself quite a cook, always dazzling his guests with great food, after a mandatory three-hour cocktail hour.¹² We can picture him rolling his shoulders as he slumps over the podium, preparing to launch into a protracted rant, the intensity and mischievous twinkle in his eyes.¹³ There is also the way he swirls his pencil above the paper as he prepares to write, or the laborious manner in which he typed, with only his index fingers, on his antiquated typewriter atop his equally antiquated desk.¹⁴ We are introduced to a stubborn yet modest and selfless man with a simple love of baseball, Boston, cooking and, above all, fairness in all things. The portrait of an equally lovable and maddening man gives us a glimpse behind the headlines and union records and offers us a chance to experience "The Bear" in his own life and times.

James W. Orr's life began and ended during periods of crisis. He was born during the Great Depression in Saint John, New Brunswick's most industrialized city, in 1936, and passed away in 2009, well into the era that labour historian Bryan Palmer has

¹⁰ Nice interview.

¹¹ George Vair, interview by author, Saint John, NB, 10 April 2014, tape recording and transcript in possession of author.

¹² Pat Riley, interview by author, Saint John, NB, 23 May 2013, tape recording and transcript in possession of author.

¹³ Riley, "Eulogy", 1.

¹⁴ Nice interview.

described as “the time of permanent crisis.”¹⁵ He came of age during the momentous Canadian Seamen’s Union strike of 1949 (selling bricks and bicycle chains to the strikers as a youth), subsequently joining the navy before going on to become a lifelong union man on the docks as a member of the International Longshoremen’s Association (ILA). His radical streak continued into his latest years, as Orr presciently made sense of the changing world around him and never relented in his efforts to create a fairer world. He did not seek power in its own right, but occasionally accepted it when thrust upon him, as, for example, in his brief stint as union treasurer or the nominal role, following his retirement in 2001, as a director of the Saint John Port Authority. He was always proud of his role on the bargaining committee of the International Longshoremen’s Association, overseeing every collective agreement from the early 1970s until his retirement and acting as a consistent voice for his fellow longshoremen.¹⁶ Those who knew him identify him as the quintessential man on the ground during protests, at times even forming his own picket line in opposition of both union leadership and his fellow rank-and-filers.¹⁷ Sticking to his principles not only cost him formal influence but also serious physical injury, as he recounted an international union convention where he voted against the will of the leadership and “left in a wheelchair.”¹⁸ He was also a member of a faction of dissident locals who fought a losing battle for independence from the international. Nevertheless, he remained a staunch union man, a self-professed “social unionist,” committed not only to fighting for better conditions for his comrades,

¹⁵ Bryan Palmer, *Working Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800-1991*, Second Edition (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1992), 405.

¹⁶ Jimmy Orr, interview by Carol Ferguson, Saint John, NB, 2 March 2006, Labour History in New Brunswick Fonds, MS4A18.

¹⁷ Orr interview, 24 November 2005.

¹⁸ Orr interview, 2 March 2006.

but to sharing the results with the rest of society. While he could be counted on to partake in public demonstrations of many kinds, he could also be seen working at the Romero House soup kitchen and quietly donating to a whole host of charities such as the Sierra Club and Amnesty International.¹⁹

Jimmy Orr was a worker who read, and who asked difficult questions. He was largely self-educated, having admittedly spent his book money to “shoot pool with and go to the movies” when he was supposed to be attending vocational school. Orr ended up rebelling against the educational establishment altogether, quitting school at sixteen. He then began his long working career, beginning with the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR).²⁰ As an adult and well into his union career, he attended the union-sponsored Atlantic Region Labour Education Centre (ARLEC) at St. Francis Xavier University, which he claimed widened his outlook. Despite his abandonment of formal education as a youth, Riley describes Orr as “a very learned man. There wasn’t a topic that could come up which he wouldn’t be able to speak on. His hours upon hours of reading and his sharp mind allowed him to amaze us and to transfix us time and time again... Perhaps it was his curious nature; perhaps just his mischievous side; whatever it was, his ability to expound upon the most obscure of topics always astounded.”²¹ Orr also possessed a voluminous knowledge of history and while abroad delighted his hosts with his deep discussions of their country’s past.²² His conception of the world around him revealed some underlying tensions in his thought. He worked for internationalist causes,

¹⁹ Riley, “Eulogy,” 2-3.

²⁰ Orr interview, 24 November 2005.

²¹ Riley, “Eulogy,” 1.

²² Riley interview.

but he also had a nationalist streak and was a self-avowed patriot. He was a militant unionist, so much so that when, as a child, his daughter was asked what her religion was, she replied to her flabbergasted teacher, “union.” However, despite his unwavering faith in the trade union movement, he was not an unquestioning follower. In fact, from the age of sixteen he was demanding copies of the union constitution, collective agreements and other documents that the union hierarchy was reluctant to provide to the soon to be rank-and-file firebrand.²³ He was also well aware of the ILA’s history of corruption and mob connections in the United States, struggling against the domineering tentacles of the international and seeking to maintain local autonomy. Orr was skeptical of the prevailing protectionist trend of business, or bread and butter, unionism and thought unions should be leading a wider struggle for social justice based upon equality and inclusion. His union activism began at the advent of what is often called “industrial legality”, only to later confront what has been dubbed the “neoliberal rollback” at the apex of his career.²⁴

Politically, Orr supported the New Democratic Party (NDP) (for whom he ran as a candidate in 1978) and the old Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), but he also had Marxist leanings. He attended Communist Party conventions, supported the Party financially during its legal struggle to retain official status in elections and there is evidence that he held Marxist reading groups. His daughter, Jamie, has recalled an instance where a fiery Orr delivered a thundering rendition of the Communist Manifesto

²³ Orr interview, 24 November 2005.

²⁴ Thom Workman, *If You're in my Way, I'm Walking: The Assault on Working People since 1970* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2009), 7.

to group of student activists in Honolulu.²⁵ He often complained that dissident union locals were eviscerated due to accusations of “Communist domination” and fears that “Joseph Stalin would be coming down King Street waving a red flag.” He felt that there was nothing wrong with being a Communist and that in fact many of the greatest labour leaders had such sympathies and (as was quite important to Orr and others) that they were “just as patriotic as anybody else.”²⁶ However, he had no more sympathy for starry-eyed ideologists. He was not uncritical of alleged “workers’ paradises,” and there are records of his showing contempt for inequality and discrimination in Cuba, such as the export of Cuban lobster for tourists and foreigners. Despite this, Orr’s relationship with his Cuban hosts during various port missions to and from Cuba was excellent, and they were always delighted to see him and enjoyed his meals, including an introduction to moose meat, which they found quite exotic.²⁷ One of his proudest achievements was his role in the NO CANDU for Argentina crisis, in conjunction with a national group for Argentinean human and labour rights; several year later, however, he was reading publications critical of the role of imperialism in the Falklands war and calling upon Marxists to support the Argentinean junta against Britain and its allies. Furthermore, Orr’s position as a longshoreman gave him a unique internationalist position from which he could build like-minded contacts and perceive coming global trends that transcended local interests. This global view led him to appreciate the neoliberal aspect of globalization and labour’s commensurate internationalization, notably in the support for

²⁵ Jamie Orr, “Retirement Letter,” [2001], copy provided by Pat Riley.

²⁶ Orr interview, 2 March 2006.

²⁷ Riley interview; *Saint John Evening-Times Globe*, 7 December 1987.

union and human rights in Argentina and the global boycott of scab ships and “industrial mercenaries” used by an Australian shipping company.

The task of telling Jimmy’s story, and of allowing him to tell it in his own words, is a delicate exercise. Not unlike the work of David Roediger in compiling the tale of Fred Thompson, a Saint John-born activist of an earlier generation who went on to international prominence in the Industrial Workers of the World, the availability of the subject’s own recollections are limited and become spotty in the latter portion of his life. While Carol Ferguson’s invaluable interviews with Orr himself are a treasure for the historian, Jimmy’s recollections beyond his youth are sometimes anecdotal and his memory sometimes vague or fading, as they were conducted only a few years before he passed away from his battle with cancer. With this in mind, Chapter One deals with Orr’s youth and path to militancy follows a chronological narrative, heavily dependent on Orr’s own recollections and some available contextual sources. However, the discussion of his union activities in Saint John in Chapter Two and the international implications of Orr’s activism in Chapter Three are presented more episodically, and at times, thematically, in order to stress the principal themes during his adult life, and thanks to the interviews with him and his contemporaries, his voice continues to be heard in these contexts as well. As Orr himself touches upon some of his proudest moments and later exploits in a similarly episodic fashion, he is not be deprived of a voice in the later chapters, although it may be a bit less boisterous than Jimmy would have been had he the chance to captivate us with it himself. However, the recollections of Nice, Vair and Riley help fill the gaps and provide us with the human and comical side of the story when Orr’s own voice is silent. This being said, Orr’s life is

reconstructed from birth to death, from mischievous scamp to union firebrand and from first impressions to a beloved friend.

He appears before us sometimes in his own words and often with a human face that establishes him as one ever present member of the crowds that make up Saint John's, and indeed, the world's, efforts to construct a better world. Orr's history fits, and it seems likely he would be comfortable with the description, the role of the "anonymous local militant," being heavily involved in on the ground union activity and direct action while avoiding the bureaucratizing and stultifying role of a paid union officer. As a prime example of a rank-and-file firebrand, his experiences can illuminate and add to our understanding of lower-level union activity. It may be argued that Orr was atypical in his views and his experience. He was certainly unique, but he did not start his career as a militant. It is for this very reason that the Lynds ask us to value this sort of experience: "They had radical ideas. But precisely because they did not start out as organizers or leaders or radicals, their accounts throw light on what has been experienced or may be experienced with variations by a much larger number of people."²⁸"The Bear's" humble experiences, while not arousing much attention in traditional histories or mainstream news, had far-reaching implications and can elucidate many layers of experience, far beyond his own, but only if we spare him the oversimplified and faceless construct of the "anonymous local militant."

²⁸ Lynd and Lynd, 6.

Chapter One

“Jesus Christ, you’re getting worse!”

Jimmy Orr’s Path to Militancy

Jimmy “The Bear” Orr, the formidable figure he is remembered as today, came of age in a very particular time and place, A combination of social and family context and a variety of events beyond Orr’s control as well as his own mischievous and contrarian character ultimately led him to be remembered as a working people’s “champion” by those who knew him.¹ Orr grew up during a transitional period for Canadian labour, with the advent of industrial legality and the begrudging acceptance of unions by governments and employers. This was also a time of global upheaval, as Orr was born during the last part of the Great Depression and lived through the Second World War. This was closely followed by the momentous Canadian Seamen’s Union strike of 1949 and the ensuing global dock boycotts, one of which occurred within a stone’s throw of

¹ Pat Riley, “Eulogy,” May 2010, copy provided by David Frank, 4.

Orr's homestead. Another contributing factor was a family history of unionism, as his father and grandfather were both union members who worked for the Canadian Pacific Railway. Last, but perhaps most importantly, was Orr's rebellious character, which was evident from an early age and did not wane with time. His path to activism must be placed in the milieu in which he grew up in order to give us a clearer view of how he responded to the world around him. Orr's experiences changed him from a young rebel without a cause "playing the bigshot" to a man described by his friends as spartan, principled, selfless, foolishly idealistic and with a devotion to social unionism bordering upon religious fervor.²

Ian McKay, in his handbook *Rebels, Reds and Radicals: Rethinking Canada's Left History*, provides a very useful analytical framework for tracing the paths of young leftists.³ In addition to "matrix events," momentous upheavals that elicit a "moment of refusal," a radical reevaluation of present circumstances, and thoughts of "living otherwise," McKay lists some eight major paths to militancy. Orr's own experience bears elements of at least five of them. First, of course, is the lived experience of class, which, for a working-class youth growing up in industrial West Saint John, was unavoidable. In a similar vein, the matter of generation is important, with Orr experiencing both the Great Depression and the post war period, as well living through the upheavals of the 1960s, "matrix events" that helped to reshape the consciousness of entire cohorts of future leftists. Once again, context, and the nature of West Saint John

² Jimmy Orr, interview by Carol Ferguson, Saint John, NB, 24 November 2005, Labour History in New Brunswick Fonds, MC3477 MS4A18, Provincial Archives of New Brunswick (PANB).

Pat Riley, interview by author, Saint John, NB, 23 May 2013, tape recording and transcript in possession of author.

³ Ian McKay, *Rebels, Reds, Radicals: Rethinking Canada's Left History* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2005), 103, 36.

in particular, were formative in that Jimmy's proximity to the port and its denizens helped to give the young radical a global awareness, yet another of McKay's paths. There is also the contributing factor of religion, which played an important, if understated, role in Orr's life, underpinning The Bear's own social gospel. Moreover, the historical scout, following McKay's reconnaissance, cannot remain silent on the matter of agency. While Orr was immersed in the culture of working-class experience, he went well out of his way to dive headlong into leftism. The critical path of intellectual inquiry, of voracious personal reading and of acting as the gadfly exhibits both the force of Orr's character and his own role in shaping his less than inevitable path to militancy.

The world that Orr was born into in December 1936 was one in turmoil. To begin, the global economy had been decimated, and showed little sign of recovery. Regardless, amid the squalor of reality newspapers were replete with advertisements for top hats, fur coats and men's reducing belts.⁴ Mussolini rampaged across North Africa, while the soon-to-be Axis powers tested their mettle in Spain against an international brigade of left-leaning volunteers, foreshadowing the clash of ideologies to come. Nazi Germany had just hosted the Olympics in Berlin, and in the Western democracies, the appeal of varying socialisms was at a fever pitch and there was no shortage of labour unrest. More locally, as the struggling residents of Saint John sought to recover from the Great Depression, they were distracted by the overflight of the doomed *Hindenburg* in 1936 and the royal visit of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth in 1939.⁵

⁴ *Saint John Evening Times-Globe*, 2 November 1936.

⁵ David Goss, *Saint John West and its Neighbours* (Charleston: Arcadia, 1999), 45, 83.

James William Orr was born in the General Hospital on 16 December 1936 in Saint John to James Frederick and Norma May Orr into a self-described “lower middle class” family.⁶ Jimmy would be the oldest of three sons, the others being Robert and David, three and ten years his junior, respectively. The Orrs would have had an older sister, but the child miscarried and Norma then went on to have only the three boys, who proved to be enough of a handful. They lived in a tenement house at 93 Rodney Street in West Saint John, within a stone’s throw of the docks, which were at that time undergoing a process of revitalization.⁷ For what it was worth, Saint John had remained the preeminent manufacturing city of New Brunswick amid the crisis years of the Depression.⁸ It was common for those living in the neighbourhood to end up working for either the Canadian Pacific Railway or the port at some point in their lives. Jimmy, his father Fred and brother Robert were no exception.⁹

Orr’s father was born in Bonny River, in Charlotte County. Frederick Orr’s mother was a British home child from Bristol (née Thorn), whereas Orr’s mother’s parents were West Siders. On her paternal side, the Lees had moved from the South End of Saint John after the Saint John fire of 1877, when his grandfather was 11 years old, to the West Side, where Orr would live for his entire life. His mother’s perhaps unfortunate family had to move from Saint James Street to Protection Street, near Piers 10/11, only to be burned out again in the port fire of 1931. The family would come to stay on

⁶ Orr interview, 24 November 2005.

⁷ Goss, *Saint John West*, 21.

⁸ *Saint John Evening Times-Globe*, 2 November 1936.

⁹ 1970 Saint John City Directory (Saint John: Might Directories, 1970); 1990 Saint John City Directory (Saint John: Might Directories, 1991).

Rodney Street by the time Orr was born, and he would not move far for the remainder of his life.¹⁰

The neighbourhood of Orr's youth was very different from that of today. Rodney Street alone was once host to many small businesses and much more hustle and bustle. In 1936, Rodney Street boasted a tobacconist, two grocers, a general store, a tailor, a barber, a shoe store and two shoe repair shops, a laundry, a garage, a pharmacy, a coal plant and the ever-enduring Carleton Curling Rink.¹¹ This was well before the advent of chains and multinationals that would begin to sweep the neighbourhood in the 1960s and 1970s, and the neighborhood was replete with small businesses and mom and pop shops, giving it a diverse and intimate atmosphere. In fact, David Goss has recalled an early childhood victory of West Side children against the burgeoning influence of multinationals: a metal Coca Cola sign at a corner store which became such a target for snowballs that it lasted a mere two days before the owner took it down.¹² Residents of Saint John West needed to travel only a few blocks for most of their daily needs and were on personal terms with their neighbours and shopkeepers.¹³

West Saint John had a full cast of characters of its own. There was the Reverend William Percy Haigh, who came to St. George's Anglican Church in 1932, Saint John's oldest church in continual use since 1821, and the church that Orr himself attended. He was Orr's minister, later performing Jimmy's marriage to Mary Chamberlain in 1962.¹⁴

¹⁰ Orr interview, 24 November 2005.

¹¹ 1936 Saint John City Directory (Saint John: Barnes and Company, 1936).

¹² David Goss, *West Side Stories: People, History and Local Lore from West Saint John* (Halifax: Nimbus, 2004), 8.

¹³ Goss, *Saint John West*, 86.

¹⁴ Goss, *West Side Stories*, 124; *Official Notice of Marriage* (1962), Vital Statistics from Government Records, RS141 Microform F24960, PANB.

Rev. Haigh was described as low key, modest and unpretentious. Although some found it unseemly, he would rub shoulders with the “common man” and could often be found in pool halls or at community events such as ice cream eating contests. He was certainly more than met the eye. The good reverend once caught one of his parishioners off guard when he met him in a bar boxing and asked him to teach him how. Taken aback, the man did eventually oblige, only to be knocked off his feet immediately by the surly priest who then revealed that he had in fact trained in the sport as a younger man. Even the reverend had his foibles and would often turn off his hearing aid when he had had enough of his wife’s pontificating, much to her chagrin.¹⁵ The character of his minister seems to have affected Orr’s own demeanor. His leftism would be underpinned by a down to earth and quiet religious authority and he would hold the tenets of unionism and of charity in a sacred regard.

Also characteristic of the time and place of Orr’s youth were the neighbourhood doctors. Many allowances were made to patients during the Great Depression by the doctors of poorer neighbourhoods, and credit, barter or free services were common. One notable doctor was the coarse and lovable Dr. “Bejeesus” Billy Baxter. Dr. Baxter was another selfless neighbourhood icon, whose philosophy was that “caring sometimes meant cussing.” “Bejeesus” often made house calls, delivered babies and did some creative scheduling in order to meet the needs of the neighbourhood. An avid hunter, fisher, drinker and smoker, the good doctor was also an amateur plumber and often

¹⁵ Goss, *West Side Stories*, 126-7.

accepted barter in food, especially lobster, for his services, but also often waived debts.¹⁶

While Orr's childhood was not one of especial privilege, it was also not one of privation, often thanks to the good will and charity of others, a value that would resonate with the later Orr. The tight-knit community would take care of its own, and it was characters such as Rev. Haigh or Dr. Baxter who gave Orr's family the helping hand that it needed in order to get by. Young Jimmy never wanted for food, clothing or warmth, often thanks to the generosity of neighbors and the understanding of local shopkeepers, such as the grocer Bob Smith, of Rodney Street, who allowed lines of credit and IOUs, but the family never had very much money.¹⁷ The experience of the Great Depression and of the Second World War would strengthen the bonds of community and lead many to be socially oriented. Their unassuming and very human characters would also influence Orr, who as an adult lived modestly and gave selflessly.

The neighbourhood of Jimmy's youth was one in flux. West Saint John had and would go through many sharp declines, guttings and Phoenix-like resurrections. After having been chosen as Canada's winter port in 1890, Saint John West would grow significantly until the port was devastated by fire in 1931. The Great Fire, as it was dubbed, occurred on 22 June and destroyed Piers 8 through 14, as well as their respective grain elevators. After a brief period of devastation it appeared this was a blessing in disguise, as the ruins of the port also meant an injection of new work. Greater welfare benefits were also offered to residents who aided in the demolition, and

¹⁶ Goss, *West Side Stories*, 108.

¹⁷ Orr interview, 24 November 2005.

the rubble would also serve as salvage for scavengers and those trying to make ends meet. Both Union Street and the lower end of King Street would be wiped from the map in order to make room for massive port expansion that would radically alter the landscape and force many residences and businesses, such as lumberyards and fish plants, to make way for Saint John's revitalized winter port.¹⁸ By the time of Orr's birth in 1936, this process was already well underway, with the "most dangerous" aspects already complete, and only "clear sailing" ahead.¹⁹

Orr's father was a section man for the Canadian Pacific Railway, but was often out of work due to periodic layoffs. His mother worked part-time on holidays at the post office or for Emerson's hardware store nearby in order to make ends meet. By his own estimation, Orr's childhood was lean but not one of especial privation. They lived in a tenement house near the waterfront that had been Jimmy's grandfather's. Built around the turn of the century, it would stand until the next. Education would prove prohibitively expensive and university was out of the question, which would later dismay Orr's brother Bobby, who was regarded as being quite bright. Orr would be largely self-educated, owing both to his circumstances and to his curiosity and character.

Because of this economic reality, Orr and his brothers would often engage in odd jobs in a typical childhood fashion in order to help keep the family afloat, and to keep busy and stay out of trouble (which was at times wishful thinking). Aside from household chores such as chopping wood, cleaning the yard, burning and burying garbage, hauling coke upstairs to the second floor of the tenement and walking to

¹⁸ Goss, *Saint John West*, 14, 21, 25, 36-7, 53.

¹⁹ *Saint John Evening Times-Globe*, 3 November 1936.

Barkers' grocery across the harbour to fetch the meats they could not get on Rodney, Jimmy and his brothers played young entrepreneurs around the neighborhood, fishing, junking and scavenging. Orr briefly had a paper route, but was quickly disheartened by his lack of success in his new enterprise. To begin with, he considered it a bad route, as it was not in his own neighbourhood. However, the crux of the matter was that at that time, much like his own family, his would-be customers simply had no money to spare and it was another matter entirely to collect from them. Orr mused that many ended up getting free papers because of the futility of taking them all to small claims court. He simply got out of the business when he saw that it was ruining him.²⁰

However, the young entrepreneur did not throw in the towel. He and his brothers fancied themselves jacks of all trades and hatched several other schemes in order to earn pocket change, a quarter at the time going a long way for a young man with an imagination. The boys had befriended a Chinese launderer, Tom Wan, and his brother, who ran a small business down the street from their home. As the story goes, these two fellows shared a particular predilection for eel which, for the right price, the boys were able to accommodate. The wharf, which was within rather close proximity, was an ideal place to fish for eels, which would fetch up to a quarter if they were of a particularly rotund stock. Another bit of entrepreneurship young Jimmy would engage in was lawn mowing. The only hitches to this scheme were that the young Orr and his business partner, Norman Allen, a neighbour boy, did not have their own equipment and there were very few lawns in need of mowing in their own neighbourhood. However, with

²⁰ Orr interview, 24 November 2005.

some creative pricing and a trek down to Beaconsfield, where there were many lawns to mow, the two managed to make their venture worthwhile.²¹

The young Orr's odd jobs were characteristic for the time and place, as even most adults were jacks of all trades out of necessity. This was true during the lean years of the Depression, but even endemic among those who came to the city to work as longshoremen or for the CPR in the winter even in the post-war years. Because their work was often seasonal, or due to the rush of labourers coming in search of work, the men would often, in addition to working for the port or railroad (and often both), engage in side work such as truck driving, scavenging, carpentry or fishing. Bonnie Huskins and Michael Boudreau, in their study of "Getting By" in Saint John centre in on informal family economies, with activities such as driving, bootlegging, treeing, scrounging, paving, carpentry, sewing, laundry, wallpapering, babysitting, hunting, fishing and taking in boarders in addition to regular work as being not only common, but often necessary.²² This was often a way of life in West Saint John, and it extended to the children of the neighbourhood as well.

It is sometimes said by those who know the area that you grow up fast in Saint John, and in Orr's day and age this was especially true. A particular example of this would also be one of Orr's first experiences with industrial militancy. Living within sight and sound of the port had a formative influence on West Saint John's youth. The

²¹ Orr interview, 24 November 2005.

²² Bonnie Huskins and Michael Boudreau, "'Getting By' in Postwar Saint John: Working-Class Families and New Brunswick's Informal Economy", in Michael Boudreau, Peter G. Toner and Tony Tremblay, eds., *Exploring the Dimensions of Self-Sufficiency for New Brunswick* (Fredericton: New Brunswick and Atlantic Studies Research and Development Centre, 2009), 77, 81, 84-6.

neighbourhood was saturated with seamen and longshoremen. Rodney Street especially was a hub for the saltier sort. Orr's tenement was located very near boarding houses for longshoremen and seamen, such as the Dufferin House. The Seamen's Mission was also located down the street, as well as several establishments favoured by port workers. A particular hot dog emporium down the street was frequented by police and longshoremen who came in search of food and warmth on sub-zero days. Perhaps one of the most influential was the Meltzer Restaurant, also located on Rodney Street and accessible by "The Cage," an overpass over the rails leading from the docks directly to the store.²³ This establishment was favoured by the young and visiting seamen before, during and after the war years and no doubt led to increased contact between residents and sailors with global views and experiences. Ports being "nodal points" for international trade, contact between seamen and residents, especially longshoremen, has been noted as a contributing factor to radicalization. Howard Kimeldorf has observed that seamen are "arguably the most cosmopolitan body of workers in the world. Their greatly expanded opportunities for communication with other people and their frequent contact with foreign cultures familiarized them with the breadth of socially structured inequality. Witnessing poverty on a worldwide scale led many highly impressionable young sailors to 'start asking questions.'"²⁴ This was the milieu in which the young Orr came of age, and one catastrophic episode in 1949 affected Jimmy for the rest of his days and was remembered as a watershed moment in his life.

²³ Goss, *Saint John West*, 69, 88, 114.

²⁴ Howard Kimeldorf, *Reds or Rackets? The Making of Radical and Conservative Unions on the Waterfront* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 20-1.

Jimmy's adolescence was interrupted by an influx of strangers, strikebreakers and special police. For several weeks in 1949, the young Orr witnessed an intense episode of industrial warfare "within spitting distance" of his home. In fact, the thirteen-year-old and his friends were to play a part in these battles between strikers and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, as the boys were often hanging around the docks and arming the strikers and supporters with bricks from across the tracks and bicycle chains that they had scavenged for the picketers to defend themselves from "the coppers." Orr has recalled a considerable change in the dynamic after the RCMP was called in, for many of the city police knew the local port workers and treated them decently, while the RCMP's stance was more aggressive.²⁵ On one fateful evening during the climax of the fighting, a friend of the family who happened to be a striker was badly beaten over the head by police and fled, seeking refuge from the roving gangs of police and strikebreakers. Orr happened to be home at the time, and watched as his mother tended to the wounds of the striker and helped hide him from the police when they came by the house in search of him.²⁶

The event in question has been dubbed "the world's longest picket line" and united the Saint John longshoremen and the radical sailors of the Canadian Seamen's Union virtually on Orr's doorstep.²⁷ McKay has noted that matrix events, in this case the Second World War, have a tendency to spawn smaller, localized offspring and the momentous CSU strike was symptomatic of the heightened expectations and sacrifices

²⁵ Jimmy Orr, interview by Carol Ferguson, Saint John, NB, 2 March 2006, Labour History in New Brunswick Fonds, MS4A18.

²⁶ Orr interview, 2 March 2006.

²⁷ David Frank, *Provincial Solidarities: A History of the New Brunswick Federation of Labour* (Edmonton: Athabasca University Press, 2013), 88.

of the war years.²⁸ It was unthinkable that a post-war Canada would be the same country it had been during the Depression, and radical changes were expected as compensation for years of struggle and sacrifice during the war. Canada's merchant navy was among the most valuable and hard hit of the nation's assets, and following years of labour peace for the war effort, the sailors expected their lot to improve.

The CSU was the antithesis of business unionism and a shining example of the militancy of seamen in general, still seen by its former members as "the greatest thing that ever hit this goddamn continent" and "impossible to ever bring anything like that back again." The CSU, working on the third largest merchant fleet in the world at the time, was one of the most radical unions of its day, securing eight hour watches, the hiring hall, accepting black members well before it came into vogue as well as fighting for better food and conditions upon the ships and taking on the "petty tyranny" of the shipboard officers.²⁹ During the Second World War, the CSU was considered Canada's fourth fighting force and lost a tragic 1,100 members at sea in order to supply the Allied war effort.³⁰ According to James Green, the union attempted to, and briefly did, "bring democracy to a racketeer ridden industry," only to fall victim to the "order of the club" in the largest betrayal in Canadian labour's history.³¹

Despite the massive showing of solidarity, the CSU was doomed to failure, its rank and file beaten by strikebreakers with bats and pick handles, falling victim to the Emergency Powers Act, saw its leaders jailed and the union betrayed from within the

²⁸ McKay, 102.

²⁹ Jim Green, *Against the Tide: The Story of the Canadian Seamen's Union* (Toronto: Progress Books, 1986), xii, xv.

³⁰ Frank, 87.

³¹ Green, xiii.

labour movement and formally decertified.³² This would make no difference to Orr, who is remembered as acting out of principle in order to do what is right, no matter how hopeless the task. He bore witness to the smashing of the CSU on the Saint John waterfront at the hands of imported gangsters and the RCMP, but he also saw the brave and perhaps ill-advised actions of the city's longshoremen of ILA 273, led by President William Carlin and Vice-President Frank Crilley, who would become one of Orr's lifelong heroes. The lived experience of industrial warfare virtually on his doorstep would play a very real role in reshaping his consciousness and would radicalize the young man. It was no doubt a formative moment for The Bear.

The postwar years were characterized by waves of strikes, but the CSU strike was provoked by the shipping companies who sought to roll back the union's pre-war successes, refusing to renew the old collective agreement and specifically targeting the central institution of the hiring hall.³³ Shippers aimed to fly flags of convenience in a bid to bypass Canadian labour standards and unions, thereby decimating the Canadian merchant marine. In order to do this, they signed "sweetheart deals" with the corrupt American Seafarers' International Union under the gangster Hal Banks who was appointed their Canadian director.³⁴ The result was a worldwide strike of over one million workers, including longshoremen and other shoreside workers who refused to

³² Green, xii.

³³ *Saint John Evening Times-Globe*, 6 May 1949.

³⁴ Banks himself was later described by Justice T.G. Norris as "egocentric, intolerant and ruthless. He is the stuff of the Capones and the Hoffas of whom the dictators throughout history, from the earliest times to the totalitarians, Hitler and Stalin, are prototypes." Paradoxically, as Peter Edwards notes, cabinet documents also described him as "a real service to Canada in the labour troubles of some years ago. See Peter Edwards, *The Life and Violent Times of Hal C. Banks: Waterfront Warlord* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1987), v.

touch the 90 struck Canadian ships, in countries such as Great Britain, South Africa, New Zealand, Cuba and Australia.³⁵

When the CSU put out its strike call, the Saint John labour movement put their full support behind the sailors. The New Brunswick Federation of Labour opposed admitting the rival SIU, instead pledging its financial and moral support to the CSU. The Saint John Trades and Labour Council echoed this call and passed a resolution pledging “all out support for the CSU in their strike against the Shipping Federation of Canada.” Moreover, Local 273 of the International Longshoremen’s Association made it clear that they would refuse to cross the legal picket line in order to unload cargo, despite pressure from the international itself.³⁶ This last example, of local opposition to the dictates of a monolithic international, would also ring true with an older Orr and be reflected in his later actions and opinions. The Saint John picket itself in 1949 involved three ships carrying one hundred seamen and tied up the port for more than a month.³⁷ Saint John was the last holdout in Canada, and the only Canadian city where longshoremen had “directly refused to handle cargo,” thereby incurring a massive crackdown by the RCMP.³⁸

The first clashes in Saint John began in the pre-dawn hours of 26 April, when SIU men were flown in from Montreal and protected by a wall of RCMP officers intent upon reclaiming the struck ships. The skirmishes involved more than 200 police

³⁵ Green, viii, xii.

³⁶ Frank, 87.

George Vair, “The 1949 Canadian Seaman’s Union Strike: The Saint John Story,” <http://www.wfhatthewaylabourexcitcentre.ca>

³⁷ Vair, “1949 Canadian Seaman’s Union Strike” Green, 230.

³⁸ *Saint John Evening Times-Globe*, 16 April 1949; Vair, “Canadian Seaman’s Union Strike”

officers, outnumbering the CSU men two to one, resulting in serious injuries on both sides, from cracked skulls to broken ribs, and the arrest of more than 60 CSU men for “disturbing the peace.” As a result, two of the struck ships, the SS Cottrell and the Federal Trader, of Piers 9 and 4, were boarded by SIU crews and diverted elsewhere.³⁹ Further attempts to intercept SIU strikebreakers en route were foiled by RCMP roadblocks, and the pickets were eventually encircled by steel helmeted and club wielding RCMP officers who broke the lines and arrested most of the strikers. Pickets would have to be called off due to a police “reign of terror” amid isolated clashes and RCMP mopping up operations, as a large group of children witnessed the boarding of the struck ships.⁴⁰ The CSU men and their supporters would soon return to picket, but their stand had been greatly weakened. ILA 273 Vice-President Frank Crilley warned that if the CSU fell, the ILA would be next on the chopping block.⁴¹ The strike had not ended, but the picketing had been subdued and the union was placed under trusteeship.

The sympathy strike held until 9 May, when elections occurred and “back to work candidates” were swept into office.⁴² Newly elected ILA 273 President J. Richard Shiels, along with the penitent Checkers’ local under ILA 1571 President J.F. Maloney sent their men back to work, crossing the picket lines.⁴³ By 16 May, Ottawa Valley had left West Saint John with an SIU crew amid pleas from the CSU for the government to intervene.⁴⁴ This departure, in marked contrast to that of the Cottrell and Federal Trader,

³⁹ *Saint John Evening Times-Globe*, 29 April 1949.

⁴⁰ *Saint John Evening Times-Globe*, 30 April 1949.

⁴¹ *Saint John Evening Times-Globe*, 6 May 1949.

⁴² Vair, “Canadian Seaman’s Union Strike” Green, 232.

⁴³ *Saint John Evening Times-Globe*, 10 May 1949; *Saint John Evening Times-Globe*, 12 May 1949.

⁴⁴ *Saint John Evening Times-Globe*, 16 May 1949; *Saint John Evening Times-Globe*, 12 May 1949.

was peaceful, as the RCMP crackdown had subdued the waterfront radicalism.⁴⁵ The ILA's "King" Joseph Ryan, who had repeatedly ordered the men back to work and who had now put the locals under trusteeship, wanted to send a message and ordered ILA 273 and 1571 to expel Frank Crilley for "disruptive practices." When 1571 did not act swiftly enough, Ryan revoked their charter and gave all of their contracts to the newly minted ILA 1764 (of which Orr would later be a member) and demanded they blacklist Crilley and label him a Communist, which they finally did.⁴⁶ The fate of the entire CSU would be equally abominable when the Canadian labour movement also turned against them. Decertified, blacklisted and denounced as Communists, the CSU seamen were largely driven out of the jobs.

Upon reflection, Orr came to see these developments in later years as a McCarthyist overreaction and a shameful betrayal of labour. He chalked it up to anti-Communist hysteria, claiming that even if the CSU had been dominated by Communists, they were just as patriotic as any others. An older Orr mused that "of course they were waving that communist thing all around everybody's head. Joseph Stalin's gonna be coming down the street – King Street waving the red flag and taking over the waterfront. These were all good decent men and they always were."⁴⁷

The ordeal also gave him a great deal of respect for the principled and determined Frank Crilley, the vice-president of ILA 273, and as Orr would put it, one of the guys who took the fall for ILA 273's solidarity, a feature that he would both admire and emulate as a militant. Orr would later become a personal friend of Crilley's, a dour

⁴⁵ *Saint John Evening Times-Globe*, 17 May 1949.

⁴⁶ Vair, "Canadian Seaman's Union Strike"

⁴⁷ Orr interview, 2 March 2006.

teetotaling Irishman who left seminary in order to pursue the cause of labour, describing him as a good one to listen to, a homespun and well-read philosopher who “could teach you a lot.” He would credit Crilley with being one of the figures in his life who was “instrumental in giving me the philosophy that I continued on with.”⁴⁸ Before Crilley passed away, he announced: “I simply want to be remembered as longshoreman Frank Crilley.”⁴⁹ This too was a sentiment that a later Orr would echo.

While the young Orr was likely unaware of Hal Banks, this character would serve as an interesting foil for the later Orr, the activist. Greedy, power-hungry and violent, the business unionist would be Jimmy’s antithesis. The adult would self-consciously model himself on contrary premises as a selfless rank-and-file militant willing to sacrifice his own personal advancement, and in fact, eschew formal power in favour of acting as the “conscience” of the union, in spite of the physical and institutional repercussions of opposing corrupt union politics.

Young Jimmy’s youth was not all entrepreneurship and street smarts, and his rebellious streak did not fully appear until his later school years. Despite some of his educational experiences on his own or on the streets, the young pupil was fairly well behaved and received fine marks for his first few years. Orr attended New Albert School from Grades One to Nine and flourished.⁵⁰ This time has been recalled as one during which teachers had real authority, and taught children respect, but even this “real

⁴⁸ Orr interview, 2 March 2006.

⁴⁹ Vair, “Canadian Seaman’s Union Strike”

⁵⁰ Orr interview, 24 November 2005.

authority” could not contain young Jimmy.⁵¹ It was after this, when Orr “started playing around a little bit” that the signs of his mischievous outlook would show.⁵²

When young Jimmy was ready for secondary school, he decided, admittedly “for some reason,” that he would attend Saint John’s Vocational School, a veritable bastion of working-class culture, in order to attend classes in the electrical trade. Unfortunately for Orr’s cash-strapped family, he at this point in his life had no intention of actually attending these classes. Perhaps by this time wooed by the high rolling life of living on pocket money, Orr was soon living a double life. When Frederick caught wind of his son’s dalliances, for he was often absent, it was decided that Jimmy would instead attend Saint John High School, which would save them the expense of the student bus pass necessary to attend Vocational School, as high school students could ride the ferry across the harbour for free.

However, Orr’s misadventures were only exacerbated at this point, for he was given money with which to purchase his necessary textbooks which, not unlike his past reluctance to attend the Vocational School, he did not really intend to purchase. Instead, Jimmy used this newfound treasure in order to, in his own words, “be the big shot around ‘cause I got a few bucks.” He would skip school and go to movies uptown, buy Cokes and hang out in pool halls.⁵³ His ingenuity began to shine at this point, as he had purchased only one or two of the books he needed. When he did show up for classes, Jimmy would find a desk in each particular class that contained another student’s textbook and use it. However, he could not bring the books home to study, so he went to

⁵¹ Goss, *West Saint John*, 42.

⁵² Orr interview, 24 November 2005.

⁵³ Orr interview, 24 November 2005.

great pains in order to retain and take note of what he needed to get by. Miraculously, by his own estimation, Orr did manage to scrape through Grade 10, but it was by this point apparent to him that school was not for him and that he was already doing things his own way.

In 1951, as young Jimmy attended Grade 11, his ruse became even more intricate, and he began to doubt how much longer he could keep it up. Finding that his pilfered book money was not enough to support his lifestyle and figuring that his mother, who had graduated from Saint John High in the 1930s, was getting wise to his antics, he got his first job in order to refill his coffers. At the corner of then Union and Dock Streets was Rankin's Bakery, a small but prominent enterprise where the young miscreant found work baking cookies in the afternoons. In order to conceal this latest strand in his tangled web, Orr feigned attendance to high school basketball practices. He had long had an interest in the sport, playing it around town and in the church league as a young man. He would tell his less than credulous parents that he was staying after school for study classes and basketball practice.

His scheme finally met its demise on one fateful day after he returned from the bakery. As any other day, his mother asked how his basketball practice was, to which he replied as usual that it was fine. However, she continued to question him about his classes, which made him ill at ease. It was only when the truant officer stepped out of the other room that the futility of his situation dawned upon him. The officer had come to speak to Jimmy's parents about his five-week absence from school, and as a reflective Orr put it, "shit hit the fan after he left." Young Jimmy received a healthy walloping as his mother clubbed him about the head repeatedly with a broom handle, an experience

he remembered well. The enormity of his betrayal of their trust and his financial irresponsibility and lying offended the working-class respectability of his mother, the household manager, who had worked hard to rear her ungrateful child. Orr was cowed into returning to school, but not long after he admits that he then went into “complete rebellion against the educational system.” In his day, education was compulsory until the age of sixteen, and by that time it was more or less mutually agreed between himself, the school board and his parents that he “might as well get the hell out of school and work.” And thus began the working career of Jimmy Orr. It was hardly a glorious beginning, but his youthful rebelliousness would soon be channeled for less selfish ends.⁵⁴

In December 1952, a week before his sixteenth birthday, Orr began his first formal job. Given the intertwined nature of the neighbourhood, he wagered that there was a good chance of work at the port or for the CPR. His grandfather was a section man for the CPR, like his father, and his father’s cousins also worked for the railway. With these connections and the close-knit nature of the community, the young Orr felt reasonably sure that he could secure work: “So, if you had a little family connection it was a useful mechanism in and around those days. And, you know, they’d hire somebody if their parents or grandparents, or relatives worked for the railroads. You had a pretty good chance.” With this in mind, he went down to the freight office to apply for a job as a railway messenger or a checker. There were many jobs in the winter, and Jimmy secured a job as a railway messenger. His duties entailed going down to the Bay Shore yard, at the foot of Sea Street, in order to collect bags of waybills and walk them

⁵⁴ Orr interview, 24 November 2005.

down to the other office on Saint John Street, a trek of about a mile and a half, so that they could be processed for the car checkers. He had to make this journey three to four times a night, as he was on the night shift from midnight to eight in the morning. It was a fitting job for a restless sixteen year old with boundless energy and he much preferred it to the stultifying confines of the classroom. However, it was just as much an educational experience, for in addition to being his first formal employment, it was also Orr's first experience with joining a union.⁵⁵

It was the Brotherhood of Railway and Steamship Clerks, Freight Handlers, Express and Station Employees, and the young Orr joined the Sand Point Lodge of BRAC. His reasons for joining were quite clear. His background was that of a union family, with his father and grandfather in the same union. "So of course I joined the union because my father was in the union." That was, of course, not the only reason. Orr would later refer to the existence of a system of industrial legality in place which, at the time, made the prospect of union membership make sense to him.⁵⁶ This would be the milieu in which Orr's union career would begin, ironically only a few years after witnessing perhaps one of the largest challenges to this system in the CSU strike.

Orr claims to have joined the union "immediately" and was avidly in attendance at union meetings; he claims to have never missed a single one. Orr, while not running for office, read the union literature voraciously. At sixteen, he was going out of his way to get copies of the union constitution, by-laws and collective agreements so that he could peruse them himself. He noted that many of the union officers did not like the

⁵⁵ Orr interview, 24 November 2005.

⁵⁶ Orr interview, 24 November 2005.

rank-and-file doing this, preferring to act as enlightened stewards instead. Orr was never beholden to any establishment, and would have none of this. Even as a teenager with no union experience, Jimmy was already displaying tendencies that would make him a perpetual thorn in the side of both union leadership and management.⁵⁷

The mischievous scamp, now a proud unionist, set himself to work. He did well with the CPR and was quickly promoted to a freight checker, responsible for using the bills once delivered by himself as a messenger in order to ensure that all cargo was accounted for. As was common in the neighbourhood, young Jimmy also sought work on the docks in his off time. There were often open spots on work gangs of longshoremen at the port, especially after pay days when some of the men failed to show up for work. Orr would go down to join the throngs of casual workers seeking work through the archaic “shape-up” system that had persisted in Saint John. These non-union “highbooters,” as they were called, would gather in hopes that the foreman would select them for a day’s work. These two issues would later draw the activist Orr’s attention and he would have a hand in changing them, but for now, the young Orr accepted this state of affairs. He was a stout lad and looked older than his age, so he was allowed to work part-time as a longshoreman, often hauling heavy bags of flour or potatoes, generally the labour- intensive and demanding work that was left for the spares.⁵⁸

Not long after Orr began his working career, he was afflicted with youthful wanderlust. Like many young men at the time, he felt a desire to see the world, a desire perhaps helped by his contact with seamen and the tales they would tell about their

⁵⁷ Orr interview, 24 November 2005.

⁵⁸ Orr interview, 24 November 2005.

travels. He also had patriotic motivations, as he was a proud Canadian, and wanted to serve his country. Whatever the balance of explanations, Orr joined the Royal Canadian Navy on his seventeenth birthday in 1953. His parents were taken aback, but not necessarily surprised, by Jimmy's next scheme when they had to sign his papers due to his age, replying with resignation "Jesus, what's he up to now? You may as well go." This was the characteristic attitude his parents would take with the now, and soon to be increasingly, restless youth.⁵⁹

However, Orr's tenure as a sea dog was short-lived. He had to wait until February for basic training at Cornwallis on the Bay of Fundy. In the meantime he did odd jobs on the docks and was allowed to work a bit, mostly sweeping floors and doing other maintenance duties on the *Brunswicker*. His military career was quiet and uneventful, given that the Korean War had just settled into an uneasy ceasefire and that Orr was discharged before he could see any real action, though he had served briefly at sea in the summer. In August 1955, the young rebel was discharged on medical grounds after he began suffering from back problems that would plague him for the rest of his life. After only a year and a half in the service, Orr was transferred to the Department of Veterans Affairs hospital in Saint John, where it was later revealed that he was afflicted with tuberculosis of the spine. The unfortunate and restless eighteen-year-old would be bedridden for the next two years. On the bright side, Jimmy now had plenty of time to think, and despite his debilitating infirmity, his rebellious gusto could not be contained. After a year in the DVA hospital, he was transferred to the provincial sanatorium in East Saint John, where his next adventure would begin. Orr had recently rebelled against the

⁵⁹ Orr interview, 24 November 2005.

stultifying confines of the educational system, and the medical establishment was his next target.⁶⁰

Confined to bed and in a plaster cast, Orr was totally immobilized, but he was bound and determined to get to Moncton for better treatment. He was dissatisfied with the care at the sanatorium and felt that he knew better how to cure his ailment. They had no surgeon and he felt he was not receiving proper care. The other patients had tuberculosis of the lungs, not the spine. “The longer I stay here, I’ll be coughing and spitting!” he thought to himself as he hatched his plan. His destination was a converted air force relief centre in Moncton that was now a bone hospital for tuberculosis, which boasted a surgeon and in his estimation could better treat his spinal problems. There were many obstacles besides his inability to stand that would have prevented a less obstinate individual, but obstinacy was a quality that Jimmy had in abundance. An older Orr would retain his youthful disdain for bureaucracy, and this life event was perhaps the root of it. Unable to secure his transfer via the proper channels due to “paper work, this and that whole bureaucracy,” Orr simply declared “the Hell with it!” and found an unconventional solution.⁶¹

The plan was simple enough. He would call an ambulance and tell them he was being released, and would be taken home. Lying in bed all night and day, Orr had much time to think, and soon to plot. In an effort to bypass his wardens entirely, he called the ambulance in at noon hour, when the nurses would be away serving lunch. It went off almost without a hitch. The ambulance drivers found him and he quickly instructed them

⁶⁰ Orr interview, 24 November 2005.

⁶¹ Orr interview, 24 November 2005.

to put him on a gurney so that he could be transported, after he explained to them his immobility. What followed seems perhaps stranger than fiction. They were almost out when one of the nurses asked the ambulance drivers what they were doing. “We’re here to pick up Mr. Orr here,” to which she quickly replied, “He’s not going anywhere, he’s a patient here!” There followed a moment of confusion when the bewildered paramedics, unaware of the scheme that Jimmy had embroiled them in, asked “Are you a patient?” to which he replied in his characteristically gruff fashion: “Shut up and keep going! Get me outta this place. Just head for the door!” The scene of young Jimmy egging on the poor paramedics, who obeyed and rushed him out of the hospital as the head matron chased them, “screaming her head off” was a comical encapsulation of Orr’s dealings with the established order.

Jimmy’s muddled chauffeurs did as he asked and took him home to Rodney Street, where he spent the next week formulating the second half of his great escape. Similar to the fashion that they took his decision to run off to the Navy, Orr’s parents reacted with resignation, knowing that the young man would do as he pleased. His mother was in a dither as they brought him up the stairs on a stretcher, demanding to know what he was up to now. He explained that he was out of the sanatorium and that he would be home for a while, but that he was Moncton bound. “Jesus Christ, you’re getting worse!” was all poor Frederick Orr could muster. Not wanting to inconvenience his family more, as they had two young sons besides their resident hellraiser to worry about, Orr did not stay long. A week later, he enlisted another pair of unknowing

ambulance drivers in order to complete his quest. “You’re going to be the death of me” was the farewell from Norma, as she laughed so as not to cry.⁶²

Orr’s familiarity with the rhythms of hospital life would again be put to use in order that he could establish himself without any of the necessary paperwork, only a pair of pyjama bottoms and a shaving kit. He knew that there was a mandatory rest period between one and three o’clock in TB hospitals and he exploited this window in order to infiltrate the establishment. He directed a new duo of unknowing keepers to bypass the front desk and simply leave him on a gurney, then make their escape so that by the time he was discovered, it would be too late. When discovered and interrogated by one of the nurses as to where he came from, he replied cheekily: “From out there!” After questioning and a brief huddle between the administrator and matron, it was decided that they could not throw their new charge out on the street, so the necessary paperwork was begrudgingly filled out and his stay formalized. Six weeks later, he received the spinal fusion he had long sought, and was finally able to walk again in May of 1957. By his own initiative and guile, Orr had completed his harebrained sojourn and obtained the proper treatment to which he felt entitled, instead of languishing indefinitely in the sanatorium. When Jimmy Orr felt that something was the right thing to do, he would pursue it doggedly, no matter how unhinged or hopeless it seemed to those around him. It was this stubborn belief in right and wrong, however unconventional, which would influence his later years as an activist and crusader.

⁶² Orr interview, 24 November 2005.

Being out of commission for nearly two years, Orr undoubtedly did some soul-searching. After his childhood adventures in industrial Saint John, his early experiences with industrial strife and some time at sea, Orr had much to ponder and nothing but time. Orr, at this important stopover in his life, had to do some serious thinking about the direction his life would take and about his place in the world. As Ian McKay observes, “As soon as you start pursuing the process of figuring each problem out, and connecting it with other problems, you have started down the road to leftism,” and this Jimmy certainly had.⁶³ He had slid easily, due to his upbringing in a union family and the advent of industrial legality, into the trade union movement, but it was by his own volition and dogged determination that he would return to it with newfound dynamism and make it his life’s work.

With that being said, Orr’s spine would plague him for the rest of his working life, and it would certainly limit his options on the waterfront. He had required a spinal fusion, which took a bone from his leg and used it to fuse eight vertebrae onto his spine.⁶⁴ The operation left a fist sized crater in his back that he would keep hidden from his foes.⁶⁵ He would present himself as a towering, imposing figure when engaged in disputes, using his physical stature and loud, gruff voice to make his points. This was ultimately a façade, as the real Orr was gentle, caring and physically frail despite his reputation as a “bear.” After his ordeal, he would require physical therapy, as he had essentially forgotten how to walk in nearly two years of enforced stasis. In what he viewed as a “medical joke” or simply irony, he was then transferred back to the hospital

⁶³ McKay, 6.

⁶⁴ Orr interview, 24 November 2005.

⁶⁵ Riley interview.

in East Saint John, from which he had made his first daring escape, so that he could be closer to home, and where he was greeted like “a skunk at a garden party.”⁶⁶

In June 1957, Jimmy was well enough to return to work at the freight office. Sparing as a longshoreman was now out of the question due to his back problems. Luckily, due to his service in the Royal Canadian Navy, he was able to retain his seniority with the CPR and got a job in the freight office itself more suited to his weakened state. After a brief typing course at the local business college, he set to work typing and preparing waybills for the CPR, which he would do for the next eight years. Evidently, the typing course did not take, for his longtime friend Fred Nice would fondly recall the comical fashion in which Orr would type with only his index fingers, looking at the keys and generally taking forever while writing his later manifestos and missives.⁶⁷ He would be a “pencil man” from now on, working as a clerk and later, for the rest of his career in fact, as a checker. His final position at the CPR would be that of night supervisor, where the night owl would work from seven at night to four in the morning.

It was in 1962 that he began to drift toward the ILA, the union he would truly throw himself behind for the majority of his later career. He began sparing as a checker for the port, owing to the intersecting structures of work between the railway and the docks that forced the two to work directly together in handling cargo. Despite Orr’s earlier gallivanting as a youth, he was not afraid of hard work at this point in his life and for a time worked both jobs, coming home at four in the morning to sleep, then to rise at

⁶⁶ Orr interview, 24 November 2005.

⁶⁷ Nice interview.

seven and work for the port some days. It was during this time that he came to know many members of the ILA, both 1764 (the checkers' local) and 273 (the longshoremen's local) by virtue of living and working close to them all of his life. In 1965, he decided to make a switch and left the CPR in order to join ILA 1764 as a steamship checker, a position he would retain, among others, for the rest of his career.

As an adult, Orr also became a voracious reader. While he had general interests such as genealogy and conventional history, such as the American Civil War or European monarchy, he read a great deal of left-wing, often analytical literature.⁶⁸ Some of this reading was related to the shipping industry itself, while a great deal of it was socialist literature, such as a Communist Party discussion journal, *The Spark!* or the *Left Unity News* and the *Labour Gazette*, the federal Department of Labour's publication. Among his papers are also copies of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation's 1933 Regina Manifesto.⁶⁹ Orr claims to have identified as a socialist early in his life, and this was certainly reflected in his choice of reading material.⁷⁰

Orr was also deeply self-reflective and put a great deal of emphasis upon the nature of interpersonal interaction. The man described by those who knew him bore great resemblance to the philosophical reflections found in his files. One document in particular is entitled "Characteristics which the 'Emerging Person' Exhibits." It is a list of points, among them "a deep concern for authenticity", a "firm belief that institutions

⁶⁸ The Orrs in America: From 1790-1997, James W. Orr Fonds, MC3465, Box 4, PANB; Riley interview.

⁶⁹ *Socialist Party of Australia Maritime Bulletin*, 23 September 1981, James W. Orr Fonds, Box 1; *MUSAA News- National Publication of Maritime Unions Socialist Activity Association*, 15 May 1986, James W. Orr Fonds, Box 4; *The Spark!*, September 1997, James W. Orr Fonds, Box 3; *Left Unity News*, 16 January 1985, James W. Orr Fonds, Box 4; *Labour Gazette*, July 1978, James W. Orr Fonds, Box 5; "The Regina Manifesto" (1933), James W. Orr Fonds, Box 2.

⁷⁰ Orr interview, 2 March 2006.

exist for persons”, a “desire for openness... in all forms of leadership,” an “indifference to material comforts and rewards,” searching for “a shared purpose” and perhaps most tellingly, “when power is sought it is for other than purely selfish reasons.”⁷¹ Another reflection, this one anonymous, ponders the nature of “winners.” They are authentic persons who sometimes lose ground or even fail, but who take responsibility for their own lives. They don’t pretend to have all of the answers and listen to others and evaluate what they say, but come to their own conclusions. “A winner is not isolated from the general problems of society, but is concerned, compassionate, and committed to improving the quality of life... a winner works to make the world a better place.”⁷²

With that said, Orr held a myriad of opinions and was willing to hear out any others. What Orr did have in abundance were his principles. They were his and his alone, and while others would have sympathy for them, they were the result of the amalgam of experiences and thoughts filtered through Jimmy’s own sharp mind. First and foremost was Orr’s fervent belief in trade unionism and the concept of the picket line. To Orr, a true believer, the picket line was “inviolable.” It was something sacred, never to be desecrated, even in the face of certain defeat. In his later years, Jimmy claimed “I would never cross a picket line, I never have and I never will.” He recalled an instance at an airport where he paid three hundred dollars to change his ticket in order to avoid crossing a picket line, but by the time his flight left, the strike had ended.⁷³ Orr had taken pages from the novelist and socialist, Jack London, who described the scab as “a two legged animal with a corkscrew soul, a water logged brain, a combination

⁷¹ “Characteristics which the Emerging Person will Exhibit,” James W. Orr Fonds, Box 2.

⁷² “Winners,” James W. Orr Fonds, Box 2.

⁷³ Orr interview, 24 November 2005.

backbone of jelly and glue. Where others have hearts, he carries a tumor of rotten principles.”⁷⁴ This was, in Orr’s mind, his antithesis. He believed wholeheartedly in the words of “Solidarity Forever”⁷⁵ and vowed to stay true to the refrains of Tom Petty, whose lyrics were also in his papers: “You can stand me up at the gates of Hell, but I won’t back down... Well I know what’s right, I got just one life, in a world that keeps on pushin’ me around, but I’ll stand my ground, and I won’t back down.”⁷⁶ Fred Nice recalls that Orr “wouldn’t give in to nothing... he wasn’t giving in to their BS!”⁷⁷

Jimmy believed in the words of the poet James Russell Lowell: “true freedom is to share all the chains our brothers wear, and, with heart in hand, to be earnest to make others free.”⁷⁸ His friends recall Orr’s mindset: “to be a trade unionist was a duty as much as it was a privilege, a great responsibility.”⁷⁹ These words were reflected in Orr’s actions, for “great people are those who bring their greatness to every small thing they are doing.”⁸⁰

It was in 1962 that Orr’s life would take another drastic turn, this one unrelated to his working life but which would ultimately have an impact on it. On 19 May 1962, Orr married Mary Burnidette Chamberlain at St. George’s Anglican Church. The ceremony was performed by Orr’s lifelong spiritual mentor, the Reverend William Percy Haigh. Mary was also a clerk at the time, whose family also hailed from Saint John but who was a Roman Catholic and three years Jimmy’s senior.⁸¹ Also in 1962, the

⁷⁴ Jack London, *Scab*, James W. Orr Fonds, Box 2.

⁷⁵ Solidarity Forever, James W. Orr Fonds, Box 2.

⁷⁶ Tom Petty, *I Won’t Back Down*, James W. Orr Fonds, Box 2.

⁷⁷ Nice interview.

⁷⁸ James Russel Lowell, *Freedom*, James W. Orr Fonds, Box 2.

⁷⁹ Riley interview.

⁸⁰ Great People, James W. Orr Fonds, Box 2.

⁸¹ Orr Wedding Record, Vital Statistics and Government Records, Microform F24960.

union would bear one child, a daughter who was named Jamie who would later make Orr beam with pride, as she would also be “a bit of a rebel, just like her old man.”⁸² Later, when she attended grade school, she was asked by her teacher what religion her family was, to which she replied to the bewilderment of her interlocutor: “union,” exhibiting the pervasive influence Orr’s fervent belief in trade unionism had on those around him. “You know union’s gonna ring your old man’s bell,” the proud father would later recall.⁸³ Unfortunately, the marriage did not last and after a divorce in 1978, Orr would swear off marriage altogether. Despite his embargo on nuptials, Jimmy would later develop a long lasting and committed, though separate, relationship with his life partner Carol Olive and would act as the stepfather of her children.⁸⁴

Following the divorce, Jimmy found a new roommate in Fred Nice, an acquaintance and local longshoreman. The first of their many arguments centered on Orr’s damaged desk. Stubborn as always, he refused to give it up, even at the behest of Fred, who beseeched him to throw out the old piece of junk. Jimmy would do as Jimmy pleased, and bellowed “No! That’s coming with us!” The duo would move Jimmy’s belongings out of 93 Rodney, and against all protestations on Nice’s part, also the old desk, into their new lair in the brick apartment building at 355 Prince Street in West Saint John. This would be Jimmy’s final residence, as he would live in that apartment until the day he died. Nice’s first marriage had also broken up around the same time, so the two, who thought along the same lines, “camped out together.”⁸⁵ It was here, after an

⁸² Riley, 2.

⁸³ Orr interview, 24 November 2005.

⁸⁴ Nice interview.

⁸⁵ Nice interview.

unfortunate divorce and while living and scheming with a fellow port worker that Jimmy would cement his reputation as a labour radical. It was at that “junky” old desk, on his antiquated typewriter, typing two fingers at a time, that Orr and Nice would rock the union from within and make a host of enemies as well as a long list of new and lifelong friends and comrades, as they began their attempt to right the wrongs on the waterfront.

In the years to come, Jimmy Orr would earn himself the title of a rebel, and both employers and fellow checkers looked upon him as a troublemaker. However, his friends, often from other locals such as the general longshoremen’s union, ILA 273, or outside locals such as that of the NB Tel telephone operators union, saw him as a “burr under the saddle,” one who played a necessarily disruptive role in order to dislodge the status quo. The powers that be looked upon this mountain of a man, with his shaved head, goatee, thundering growl and burning eyes as a nuisance or even a know-nothing. Orr was often intentionally controversial and provocative. It was in his nature to force difficult questions and to debate those stuck in their ways. He would not dismiss a new idea without first giving it due consideration, casting off lazy assumptions masquerading as common sense. Orr, unlike many of his station, was a perpetual and proud underdog, often turning disadvantages on their heads. While so many labour activists were silenced by accusations of Communism, Jimmy would instead wield these oft dreaded barbs as his own weapon, bewildering his critics and never failing to “get them going.” An unpretentious activist who believed in principles above all else, even to a fault, Orr chose time and again to fight uphill battles on principle alone, a value he imparted to

those whose lives he touched: “If we were outgunned, then so be it, we would do what we believed.”⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Riley interview.

Chapter Two

The Burr under the Saddle and His Hundred Brats:

Jimmy Orr and the Radicalization of ILA 273

In the years that followed, Jimmy Orr managed to carve out a place for himself in the ILA bureaucracy. In 1970, the current secretary-treasurer of ILA 1764, Jim McLaughlin, suffered from a stroke and was unable to fulfill his duties, so Orr offered to bear his burden, holding the position from 1970 until 1978, when his career in office would come to an inglorious end. During this time, Orr also secured himself a permanent spot on the bargaining committee, to which he took with gusto, acting as a voice for the rank-and-file and a painstaking scourer of collective agreements.¹

¹ Jimmy Orr, interview by Carol Ferguson, Saint John, NB, 2 March 2006, Labour History In New Brunswick Fonds, MC 3477 MS4A18, Provincial Archives of New Brunswick (PANB).

The system of industrial legality now in place differed starkly from past traditions of radicalism, and had created new challenges and cleavages between union officers and the rank-and-file. There would be resistance from within and without, including uncharacteristic examples of employers ironically keeping the old “direct action” traditions alive.² However, after some years of experience, Orr, like many others of his generation, began to perceive the flaws in this new system and he would spend the latter part of his career as a reformer from within. Rank-and-file activism was subordinated to the laborious process of official bureaucracy, stifling dynamism and alienating their membership. It became apparent to many rank-and-filers that they need not only struggle against the employers, but also their own leadership, which was increasingly seen as complicit in supporting a flawed system. The entrenched, inward looking conservatism of the ILA became increasingly evident and Orr actively struggled to impart more progressive values to the union. In this, he ultimately collaborated with a coterie of dissident highbooters and his shiplining roommate Fred Nice in order to push for change within the locals and to force them to take in new members. Despite the initial stiff resistance, these actions ultimately resulted in a radical shift in the Saint John ILA’s outlook, which eventually came to be supported by the majority of the membership. This remade the locals into a more responsible, democratic and outward looking organization which went on to take on the international itself over issues of corruption and Canadian autonomy.

² Michael Wilcox, “Canada Veneers and Irving Oil: Labour and the Postwar Settlement in Saint John, New Brunswick, 1945-1949” (M.A. Thesis, University of New Brunswick, 2007), 51.

During these years Orr was one of the militant hard core of union members who were trying to change conditions on the waterfront and in Saint John in general. While he participated in various wildcat strikes in the 1960s, mirroring the militancy of the rank-and-file in the Canadian labour movement at large during this period, he also played a significant role in the first major ILA strike in many years, which took place in 1974, with the arrival of the Maritime Employers' Association. It was also around this time that Orr was chosen to attend the Atlantic Region Labour Education Centre at St. Francis Xavier University, a training school sponsored by the Federations of Labour in Atlantic, an experience that he claimed widened his outlook on the trade union movement and politics in general.³ Orr was among the very first class of ARLEC, which had formed that year. His ARLEC course notes from 1972 include topics such as poverty, power, productivity, party politics, the Atlantic economy, international unionism, major labour organizations, history, public speaking and leadership. Perhaps most relevant were his notes on differing union philosophies and the social responsibilities of trade unions, which he evidently took to heart. In his characteristic all-capitalized printing, written even larger, is a warning: "BEWARE OF BECOMING COMPLACENT."⁴ This widened outlook would make clear to Jimmy the narrower focus of his own union.⁵

³ Orr interview, 2 March 2006.

⁴ ARLEC Class Notes, October 1972, James W. Orr Fonds, MC3465 Box 3, PANB.

⁵ ARLEC was an adult educational program formed in 1972 through the Atlantic Development Council, St. Francis Xavier University and the local labour movement in order to educate future labour activists on the broader issues of the movement, specific issues relating to Atlantic Canada and to teach communication skills and image building. Quotas of potential activists were chosen from each of the Atlantic provinces for attendance at the school. ("History of ARLEC." Unpublished manuscript, copy provided by David Frank.

When the MEA, a regional association that united employers from Quebec to Nova Scotia, came to Saint John, it was formed primarily to quell labour revolt on the St. Lawrence. Throughout the 1970s, there were many difficulties on the waterfront in Quebec, including frequent, protracted strikes that would often turn bloody.⁶ Arnie Masters, once the Deputy Labour Minister to Bryce Mackasey under the Liberal government, submitted a proposal that called for an employers' association and geographic certification in order to bring order to the docks.⁷ Saint John was not without issues itself.⁸ It was at this time that a momentous technological overhaul was sweeping the Saint John port, and indeed, the industry, radically altering the structures of work, as well as relations with the employer. Technological change had been creeping in since the 1960s, with more lift machines and cranes, followed by unitized cargo. The most severe impact was that of containerization, which came in the late 1960s and drastically altered traditional workplace practices, "streamlining" the process of transport and altering workforce organization, with the MEA attempting to reform the amorphous ILA into a structured and flexible industrial-type workforce.⁹

To Orr and others at the time, the change was largely one of attitude. The MEA had arrived in Montreal around 1969 and had come to Saint John by 1970. While the Saint John locals took little notice of the organization at first, by the time their contract

⁶ Alexander Pathy; Marianne Dufour; Curtis Fahey, *Waterfront Blues: Labour Strife at the Port of Montreal, 1960-1978* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 208.

⁷ Pat Riley, interview by author, Saint John, NB, 23 May 2013, tape recording and transcript in possession of author.

⁸ *Saint John Evening Times-Globe*, 14 February 1974.

⁹ Patti Breen, *Along the Shore: Saint John Longshoremen 1849-1999* (Saint John: The New Brunswick Consortium of Writers, 1999), 39-40; E.J. Dosman, *Labour Management Relations on the Saint John Waterfront: ILA Local 273 and the Maritime Employers Association, Transportation Paper No. 6* (Toronto: University of Toronto/York University Joint Program in Transportation, 1980), 18.

expired in 1972, the MEA's presence was quite apparent. Orr recalled that they would not be bargained with and were intent on "hammering us into the ground." It was seen as an assertion of authority on the part of the employers and devolved into "a pissing match" with both sides testing each other's limits.¹⁰ Jimmy described them as "hatchet men" and was acquainted with the sort of unrest that occurred on the Montreal docks, as he had worked there seasonally as a spare checker in the fall from 1968 to 1971.¹¹ According to Orr, the ILA in Saint John had not been very militant at all up to that point, "muddling" their way through the local bargaining process and eventually ending up pleasing all parties involved. However, when the MEA arrived with a brick of a document that spelled out the gang busting changes they were intent to make, the unions were provoked.¹²

The worst part of the matter, for Orr and likeminded workers, was the assertion of authority. Orr favored a more "equal-equal thing" and scorned having to "doff our cap" and "genuflect" to the boss. This was surely a result of the organizational changes, as well as the changes in bargaining structure, brought about by both technological change and the MEA. Traditionally, longshoremen had seen themselves as a privileged profession; one with a certain freedom, on the flip side of their inherent instability. They saw themselves as "partners" on the waterfront, but this radical shift made it clear to them that their status was being reduced to that of ordinary "employees."¹³ This

¹⁰ Orr interview, 2 March 2006.

¹¹ Orr interview, 24 November 2005.

¹² Orr interview, 2 March 2006.

¹³ Dosman, 20.

sentiment was articulated by ILA 273's Business Agent, Clarence Phillips, who claimed that the MEA "want to own us."¹⁴

The MEA, representing an alliance of 18 local employers, intended to drastically alter the traditional way of doing things, in line with the accompanying technological changes.¹⁵ ILA 273 had been without a contract since 1972 due to many points of disagreement over the coming changes. The two fundamental means by which longshoremen had historically exercised workplace control were under siege: hiring processes and workplace practices. The MEA intended to do away with the old order entirely. For one, the MEA wanted exclusive rights to hiring longshoremen so as to guarantee the highest skilled workers, which would severely limit the men's ability to leverage outside employers against the association, as well as preclude them from taking non-union jobs. As was the case in Montreal, the MEA also reserved the right to reduce the size of work gangs and to split them up as they saw fit in the interest of maximizing the output of a smaller workforce in an effort to achieve "flexibility."¹⁶ Other workplace issues, such as sling load sizes were also a matter of contention. Sling loads had tripled, while wages had not, amid fears that the workforce would be significantly reduced by the use of machinery.¹⁷ In addition, the MEA wanted a three-year contract, whereas the ILA favoured two years, as the cost of living at the time was in rapid fluctuation due in part to a global energy crisis.¹⁸

¹⁴ *Saint John Evening Times-Globe*, 2 February 1974.

¹⁵ *Saint John Evening Times-Globe*, 23 February 1974.

¹⁶ *Saint John Evening Times-Globe*, 7 February 1974.

¹⁷ *Saint John Evening Times-Globe*, 14 February 1974.

¹⁸ *Saint John Evening Times-Globe*, 11 February 1974.

¹⁹ *Saint John Evening Times-Globe*, 2 February 1974.

²⁰ Orr interview, 24 November 2005.

This situation resulted in the ILA's first major strike in many decades.¹⁹ It came in waves in 1974, with the longshoremen's union taking the lead. However, this would prove to be yet another lesson in solidarity, this time with non-waterfront unions from the city itself. The ILA had been bargaining with the MEA since 1972, around the time of an NB Tel strike in Saint John by the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers. Many of the telephone operators out on picket duty were women and had encountered harassment, not by management but by "punks," as they were trying to maintain a 24-hour picket. As a showing of support, all the ILA unions, the longshoremen, checkers and shipliners, took shifts standing with the NB Tel workers in order to make sure they were comfortable and able to maintain their picket. Orr recalls that they developed a good rapport, and that some of the men even got a few dates out of it, and the strike resulted in at least one marriage.²⁰

The strike began 1 February 1974 and would be described by the *Evening Times-Globe* as the first "complete strike shutdown of the port in 60 years."²¹ A representative from ILA 273 claimed that "the word 'strike' has not been heard on the waterfront in years, but the MEA's arrogant, dictatorial approach has put it on the tongue of every longshoreman."²² The strike was supported by the Waterfront Labour Council as well as the Saint John and District Labour Council, while the railway workers refused to handle port cargo and the Halifax ILA would refuse to be "used against" their brothers in Saint John, declining to handle diverted vessels.²³ ILA 273 stayed out for 19 days without a

²¹ *Saint John Evening Times-Globe*, 2 February 1974

²² *Saint John Evening Times-Globe*, 14 February 1974.

²³ *Saint John Evening Times-Globe*, 2 February 1974; *Saint John Evening Times-Globe*, 13 February 1974.

strike fund, in the meantime signing a new contract with the McKay Lumber Company and honouring their existing contract with the MacMillan-Rothesay paper company.²⁴ Mayor Robert Lockhart intervened by the end of the second week, with labour figures city councilman Fred Hodges of the Saint John and District Labour Council and Albert Vincent of the Bricklayers, Masons and Plasterers International Union acting as informal mediators.²⁵ After a few more sessions and setbacks, a deal was finally reached on 19 February, with both sides agreeing to a 2.5 year contract which dropped the exclusive hiring clause.²⁶

This was not the end of the turmoil on the waterfront. During this time, there had also been a Harbour Police strike against the National Harbours Board for parity with the city police, which was settled 22 February, again with the help of Hodges and Vincent.²⁷ Yet another strike loomed, as ILA 1764 awaited the results of a federal conciliation report. Jimmy Orr, as the secretary-treasurer of the local, told the media that they too had been without a contract with the MEA for 15 months and that their concerns were also not with wages but with clauses governing working conditions.²⁸ This threatened to paralyze the recently functioning port once again.

The checkers' strike began dramatically on 8 March, with the membership filing out of a special meeting at which they had ratified the strike vote by 90 per cent amid the height of a massive port fire which was still destroying the two main cargo sheds.

²⁴ *Saint John Evening Times-Globe*, 14 February 1974.

²⁵ *Saint John Evening Times-Globe*, 12 February 1974; *Saint John Evening Times-Globe*, 15 February 1974.

²⁶ *Saint John Evening Times-Globe*, 19 February 1974; *Saint John Evening Times-Globe*, 20 February 1974.

²⁷ *Saint John Evening Times-Globe*, 22 February 1974.

²⁸ *Saint John Evening Times-Globe*, 18 February 1974.

This was in addition to the shutdown of Piers 4, 8 and 9 due to new construction on the Rodney terminal.²⁹ The strike action itself was significant because it was the first time in local ILA history of a checkers' union going out on a freestanding strike.³⁰ The longshoremen, grateful for ILA 1764's refusal to cross their picket lines, would return the favour and refuse to report to work in spite of MEA court injunctions to force them back to work, which were ultimately dismissed.³¹

The president of Local 1764 at this time was Pat Beckingham, who, along with Orr and a few others on the bargaining committee, had a "crystal ball" of sorts that helped make this historic strike a successful one. They had maintained contact with some of the more militant telephone operators and enquired as to how feasible it would be for them to tap their employers' phone lines, as they knew that they were staying at the Holiday Inn and communicating back and forth to Montreal, as well as the office numbers and home phone number of the Chairman of the Board. Their contact assured them that she knew a few trusted activists within the union who would be up to the task.

The strike lasted ten days and for those ten days the checkers refused to budge an inch. Thanks to the helping hand of the telephone operators, Orr recalled, it was "like playing poker, only their cards are turned out towards us." The union received a daily report of the exasperated phone calls to Montreal as the employers sweated over the intractable attitude of the union. "Well they got us. They're not budging. I don't know what's wrong with them. We think we can bullshit them but they're not taking the bait.

²⁹ *Saint John Evening Times-Globe*, 9 March 1974.

³⁰ Jimmy Orr, interview by Carol Ferguson, Saint John, NB, 24 November 2005, Labour History in New Brunswick Fonds, MS4A18.

³¹ *Saint John Evening Times-Globe*, 11 March 1974; *Saint John Evening Times-Globe*, 13 March 1974.

We're gonna propose this to them, but here's what—well really we can move here, but we're not going to offer that,” and so on, went the daily intelligence reports. The union knew the absolute limits that the MEA was capable of going to and would push them as close as possible.³²

The main issues of contention were union recognition, basic work rules and especially container terminal work rules. Initial meetings between Beckingham and Orr with MEA representatives, and once again Hodges and Vincent as mediators, met with some roadblocks, such as their objection to the presence of an MEA lawyer on the conciliation board, with Orr declaring “picketing will continue.” With that being said, agreement was reached on matters of wages, terms of agreement as well as dispatch and classification, but the main sticking points had not been settled.³³ The next meeting, a three-hour discussion between Orr, Beckingham and two MEA reps was dubbed by Jimmy as being “basically an information meeting,” not negotiation.³⁴ Shortly thereafter, with the railway employers seizing the keys to lift jacks being used on McKay lumber jobs, an embargo on export rail traffic and the closure of the sugar refinery due to the strike, Orr confided that the most important issues were union recognition and rules surrounding container terminals, and that if they could reach agreement on these two points, there would be a contract signed in the next 48 hours.³⁵ Orr and Beckingham were aware, thanks to the telephone operators, of the MEA's ability to make good on these clauses and refused to budge until they were satisfied.

³² Orr interview, 24 November 2005.

³³ *Saint John Evening Times-Globe*, 12 March 1974.

³⁴ *Saint John Evening Times-Globe*, 14 March 1974.

³⁵ *Saint John Evening Times-Globe*, 14 March 1974; *Saint John Evening Times-Globe*, 15 March 1974; *Saint John Evening Times-Globe*, 18 March 1974.

With the heavy-handed “hatchet men” humbled, the union was invited to the Red Room of City Hall by the Mayor in an attempt to get the port functioning again. Here the union lawyer David Brown beseeched the bargaining committee to take the latest deal, but they remained unmoved. Only a few involved were aware of the secret weapon, among them Beckingham and Orr, who instead seemed disinterested and suggested ordering out for some hot dogs and then threatening to walk out. Their lawyer was pulling his hair out trying to convince them to take the deal. “Look how far they’ve bent! You’re crazy!” he moaned. At eight o’clock that evening, the employers returned and put down the deal that the union had sought. They signed it and had achieved 90 per cent of their demands. As they left Brown asked, flabbergasted, “what kind of crystal ball do you guys have?” to which they laughed and told him they’d tell him some day.³⁶ The local would be satisfied by the duo’s hard bargaining, with the new deal receiving a vote of 95 per cent in favour.³⁷

Orr would later defend these actions by claiming that to the uninitiated, the tactics of the trade union movement may seem deceitful, but it was a part of the bargaining process and all about their duty of getting everything they could for their members. There was also the fact that they had not “conned” the employers out of anything. They had merely known where their hard limits lay and had sought to maximize their gains.³⁸ The ILA had successfully avoided being steamrollered by the new employers’ association and flexed its own muscles, resisting a complete overhaul of their work rules and the intolerable assertion of authority and monopoly.

³⁶ Orr interview, 24 November 2005.

³⁷ *Saint John Evening Times-Globe*, 18 March 1974.

³⁸ Orr interview, 24 November 2005.

Nonetheless, the relationship between the two parties remained tense in the years to come, with the MEA continually pushing for more flexibility and productivity, as well as an extension of their authority. The union would, throughout the 1970s, resist the MEA monopoly, maintaining the exceptional outside contract with MacMillan-Rothesay, but having to concede to technological change amid confrontation in 1976 and threats of stoppages in 1978, followed by a string of grievances.³⁹ However, there would be few long strikes and the two sides would be forced to work together in commonality under geographic certification, which was somewhat beneficial for both sides in the long term. In time, the MEA would be broken up into smaller associations, such as the Halifax Employers' Association and Port of Saint John Employers' Association in order to avoid "the strings being pulled in Montreal" and to allow for local nominations, as the Irvings did in Saint John. These were merely scaled down versions of the MEA with the same general concepts in play.⁴⁰

However, the results of the successful 1974 strikes proved bittersweet. While the locals had maintained their independence to some degree, change was inevitable. New changes to ILA 273's contract regarding work gangs would lead to the creation of a "basic work force" of trained and specialized union members to ensure adequate manpower for MEA hiring. This would, in effect, lead to a privileged group within the union. Given the rigid new system in place, ILA 273 would continue, as they had since 1966, to restrict their membership and to exclude thousands of "high-booters," non-union casual workers. The inward looking membership would see this as their just

³⁹ Dosman, 42, 45, 51.

⁴⁰ Riley interview.

reward for a history of instability and scarcity, effectively monopolizing the best work amid an upswing in traffic brought about by technological upgrades to the port.⁴¹

While Orr was all about getting what he could for the membership, this was at odds with his egalitarian outlook and it was now becoming clear to him that the dominant leadership did not best serve the interests of the rank-and-file, no less their casual peers. Orr had had his first taste of solidarity as an adolescent, bearing witness to the ILA's support of the CSU, and the recent reciprocal experiences with the telephone operators, coupled with his ARLEC education, informed him that this self-interested attitude was anathema to his own belief in sharing collective strength. The theme of solidarity would be the byword of Orr's later working career.

One of the major injustices on the Saint John waterfront, in the eyes of Jimmy and his collaborators, at this time was the ossified nature of the ILA, its dwindling numbers and its restrictive, aging and inward looking membership. By late 1977, ILA 273 had not taken in any new members for more than a decade and relied upon non-union men to do the grunt work, while established members used their seniority in order to cherry pick the best jobs. What is more, they routinely bumped others from their jobs, often hours into the workday, and sent them off without a nickel's pay.⁴² This became the "norm for some of the more abusive members" and caused a considerable amount of angst among the non-union men, who felt excluded and exploited by their fellow longshoremen.⁴³ These men worked as many hours as their unionized peers, but were denied membership and knocked off before they could earn overtime, being given only

⁴¹ Dosman, 19, 36, 5.

⁴² Nice interview.

⁴³ Riley interview.

the most brutalizing of work, such as “hogging” 145 lb. bags of flour.⁴⁴ Despite the fact that it did not concern him personally, or even his own local, Orr sunk his teeth into this perceived injustice and refused to yield. Pat Riley, a beneficiary of Orr’s selflessness, would recall his philosophy that “a real union is made up of people, whether they’re union members or not.”⁴⁵

The trigger for Orr’s involvement in this divisive internal union conflict would be Orr’s roommate and kindred spirit, Fred Nice, himself a member of ILA 1039, the shipliners’ local, and on its executive committee. Nice, a dock worker since the age of 14, met Orr in the early 1970s as a fellow union representative who would later make the mistake of deciding to bunk with this controversial figure, which proved “an adventure in itself.” After the two butted heads a few times themselves, they would take on “the big local, 273.” On one fateful day, Nice himself would be bumped from his work and came home hurling expletives and vowing to put an end to this abusive practice. The two were shortly thereafter approached and were all too eager to lend a hand to a hotheaded group of highbooters. Among them was Pat Riley, acting as chairman of the committee, who had been threatening to form a rival union in order to give a voice to the majority of the longshoremen who had hitherto been denied one. As Orr’s ally and sometimes sparring partner, Nice would encapsulate Jimmy’s giving nature in a rather salty adage: “If you shouldn’t have got shit on and you did get shit on, he would take that task on, ‘cuz that’s the kind of guy he was.” He would go on to say

⁴⁴ Orr interview, 24 November 2005.

⁴⁵ Riley interview.

that this would often rub people the wrong way, especially the greedy, as evidenced by the fallout from the duo's collaboration.⁴⁶

The formation of the Saint John Non-Union Longshormen's Protective Association shook the established order of the waterfront to its core. The aims of the organization were simple. It was made abundantly clear that the NULPA had no interest in taking other people's jobs, but instead wanted a fair shake at the work on the waterfront. They would recognize existing seniority, but wanted incremental steps, using past hours, in order to grant the non-union men acceptance into the local and to give them fair treatment.⁴⁷ Their specific demands were to be given priority after all ILA members were employed, to be given assurance against being "knocked off" jobs, to talk with the ILA regarding future membership and to be given the "right to receive welfare benefits" for which they had been paying.⁴⁸ Orr and Nice had advised the dissident group not to appear to compete with the ILA and helped them to tailor their rhetoric.⁴⁹ This massaged and diplomatic request was still met with hostility by the local leadership, and many rank-and-filers urged their non-union relatives to steer clear of these rebels, who, it was feared, would only get them into trouble, or even blacklisted. Orr, who had had previous experience with the Canada Labour Relations Board in gaining seven mechanics acceptance into ILA 1764 (and thereby contributing to his reputation as a radical), took the initiative and intended to use this tactic again.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Nice interview.

⁴⁷ Nice interview.

⁴⁸ The Saint John Non-Union Longshoremen's Protective Association Declaration of Aims and Objects, 9 January 1978, James W. Orr Fonds, Box 9.

⁴⁹ Pat Riley Correspondence, 26 January 1978, James W. Orr Fonds, Box 9.

⁵⁰ Orr interview, 2 March 2006.

Despite the avowed position of the leadership and the reticence of some of the highbooters, the committee was able to get over a hundred signatures in two days time and then formed a committee in order to force the issue. Pat Riley, highbooter and Chairman of the committee, the renegade son of an influential politician, was by then a firebrand waiting to happen and for whom Orr would serve as a mentor and supporter. Riley would also recall how Jimmy preferred to stay in the background, and in keeping with his giving nature, would rather counsel than lead.⁵¹ The committee would meet in West Saint John, and soon sent their petition to the CLRB.⁵² Despite the young Jimmy's loathing of his school years, one thing that he impressed upon his charges was that very thing: "always do your homework." This was vital for the NULPA, and would give them a definite edge and a great deal of bargaining power. The petition happened to coincide with the ILA's attempts to gain "geographic certification," a process which gives one jurisdiction over the labour relations of a defined area, in this case the port. However, after cracking open the books, the CLRB discovered that non-union members were doing 55 per cent of the work, which could result in the local losing its certification.⁵³

This put the local leadership on the defensive and the duo were threatened with all manner of censure. They had become pariahs in their own locals, and "could go into any tavern in this city and we would have a seat, because they didn't want anything to do with us."⁵⁴ It got to the point where the local attempted to involve the international,

⁵¹ Riley interview.

⁵² Orr interview, 2 March 2006.

⁵³ Riley interview.

⁵⁴ Nice interview.

known for its connections with organized crime and undemocratic methods, in order to quash the reformist insurrection. However, in keeping with Orr's love of the telephone, which could both serve him well in organizing or bargaining, a call was placed to the international leadership in New York. Jimmy knew what Teddy Gleason, the then president of the ILA, wanted to hear. They explained the situation and that it was their intent to bring in 150 dues paying members, which appealed to the international's fixation with their finances. "So they washed their hands of it, and said, "Let Saint John deal with it". Because all they could see was per capita coming into their coffers. That'd buy them cognac and diamond rings."⁵⁵

This was not the end of the matter however, and while the local leadership was left to its own devices, it hurled everything it had at the waterfront rebels, including threats of expulsion. Fred Nice was suspended for 30 days for going against the union, and Orr received similar threats, but kept his detractors at bay by threatening to involve the Labour Board. While described as having a heart of gold, Jimmy could also prove to be an intimidating figure, often "grunting and going" in his typical growl and arguing like a man possessed, sometimes to the point of farce.⁵⁶ His imposing demeanor and his intimate knowledge of the mechanisms of industrial legality proved sufficient to prevent his censure by formal means. However, Orr also recounted an incident on the job where he was struck by a lift jack, which did not cause any serious harm, but shook him up. He could not be certain, given the atmosphere at the time, that it was entirely accidental, because "there's always that 1%."⁵⁷ However, after winning their appeal to Gleason,

⁵⁵ Orr interview, 2 March 2006.

⁵⁶ Nice interview.

⁵⁷ Orr interview, 2 March 2006.

who wanted 300 members taken in, and after a very awkward and tense four months, the local, under immense pressure from the waterfront, the CLRB and even the ILA international headquarters, relented and took in about 118 new members and transfers, who would be scornfully and perpetually branded “The Hundred Brats.”⁵⁸

While this was a meaningful achievement, it was bittersweet for its organizers, who paid the price. Nice recalls that Orr’s own union was now more afraid of him, and that “because he had no fear... they were more interested in making money, he was more interested in making things right in the workplace... and for that he paid the penalty.”⁵⁹ While avoiding suspension, which Nice did not, Orr did not escape unscathed. When the 1978 local elections were held in April, immediately after the tense winter standoff from January to March, Orr was resoundingly voted out of office and was “history as secretary-treasurer” of his local.⁶⁰ As for Nice, he took “30 days on the beach,” but was unable to collect unemployment insurance for that period. In a fraternal gesture from the NULPA, a collection of ten dollars per member was taken in every week in order to ensure their founder’s pay until he could return to the waterfront. However, when he returned, there was a split decision on whether or not to accept his transfer into ILA 273, and as a result of his disputes with the union, he was bumped down nine ranks in seniority, from second to eleventh, for the year of 1978.⁶¹

While the success of the NULPA was certainly a breakthrough, opening up ILA 273’s decade long closed shop policy, it did not completely solve the issue of

⁵⁸ Riley interview.

⁵⁹ Nice interview.

⁶⁰ Orr interview, 2 March 2006.

⁶¹ Nice interview.

highbooters. While the entrance of 118 new members to an entrenched union estimated to be of about 400 active members was significant, the number of casual workers numbered in the thousands, with differing levels of commitment to port work. The presence of casual workers was persistent and still open to abuse due to the lack of a modern dispatch system.⁶² What was most significant about this breakthrough was Orr's host of new and energetic allies. With the infamous "Hundred Brats," nicknamed not for their ages, which varied greatly, but instead their unruly nature, came a radical shift in the union, away from dollars and cents toward a more socially and worker oriented outlook that was more in line with Orr's own personal philosophy. He also observed that "not everybody at 273 thought like the hardliners" but that they were stonewalled, and would not be elected because of their "more left wing" beliefs.⁶³

This influx of new blood coupled with generational change did much to alter the status quo and these hitherto dangerous beliefs finally had a sufficient audience in order to make an impact. There was finally a decisive shift in the battle for hegemony between the factions of business and social unionism, thanks in no small part to the efforts of Orr and Nice. Like all formations, the ILA was not immune to generational conflicts and with the NULPA came a new generation of labour activists with novel concerns and wider ambitions, mirrored in the Canadian labour movement at large in this period. The movement itself was a living and dynamic organism, subject to cyclical flux and evolution, which at times required some degree of impetus. Experienced members such as Orr, Nice and their peer Abel LeBlanc, encouraged their new charges to become more

⁶² Dosman, 37-8.

⁶³ Orr interview, 2 March 2006.

involved in the union leadership, and it was not long before “The Hundred Brats” were being elected to office.

By 1979, Pat Riley had seized his first opportunity and became Chairman of the newly created Health and Safety Committee, soon becoming a member of the executive of the union. He became a full time officer in 1986, when he became secretary-treasurer of ILA 273. Riley reminisced that the radical new ideas and enthusiasm of the “Brats” were always tempered by the wisdom and counsel of older members, such as Orr, who imparted their experiences, tactics, philosophies and support.⁶⁴ Riley would go on to become the longstanding Business Agent of ILA 273 and the union would adopt the philosophy of social unionism, of sharing their collective power with others, creating a narrative of new alliances and ambitions. On the cusp of the 1980s, the waterfront had taken a drastic turn that would extend their solidarities beyond the waterfront, to the city of Saint John and to workers in other countries.

After being resoundingly defeated within his own local, Jimmy became restless and needed an outlet for his reformist impulses, for, as he slyly remarked, “they always say idle hands is the Devil’s tools.” A persistent and maddening “burr under the saddle” with tried and true tactics, Orr figured that he had nothing to lose and turned his sights on ILA 1764, which had also been wary of accepting new members, upholding a years long embargo throughout the 1970s. This latest volley, directed now at his own union, sunk his internal popularity to “below minus zero.”⁶⁵ Three or four non-union checkers, who had befriended Jimmy, were in a situation similar to their NULPA compatriots.

⁶⁴ Riley interview.

⁶⁵ Orr interview, 2 March 2006.

While Orr's effort resulted in a winter of discontent and a four-month standoff, the "necktie" local proved resistant for the next two years. The rebel would muse about the yawning chasm between the ideals of the union and its less than stellar reality: "There are a lot of times that the enemies within. I mean if you believe the trade union movement and you believe in the rights a worker, we represented, which....And we had all these constitutions were full of glowing words, every union has one. And a lot of people and union officers don't pay any attention to it."⁶⁶

He would encounter a barrage of platitudes and rationalizations from his fellow checkers, from threats to the pension plan to competing for work and issues of seniority, but Orr saw these as thinly veiled excuses to defend the existing practices, which were rife with nepotism and corruption, relying upon having "drag" with the officers, the right relations and the influence of Methodism on the waterfront. He saw this as a bar to those who were good workers but could not get a fair shake for lack of a union card. Orr offered up a waterfront analogy for this inward looking point of view, that "if you've got, say a dollar eight and a bottle of rum. A bottle of rum tastes better when you don't put any water in it. As you add water to it, it gets weaker, or doesn't taste as good. But...so this way here they had the full bottle of rum, unadulterated, there's the saver."⁶⁷

Regardless, Orr soldiered on, pushing against the weight of his own local union in order to "adulterate the rum" of waterfront privilege and expound his message of fairness. After gaining a formal hearing with the Labour Board, and once again doing his homework, it was ruled that the checkers' local had to accept these non-union men.

⁶⁶ Orr interview, 2 March 2006.

⁶⁷ Orr interview, 2 March 2006.

Reaching new levels of unpopularity in his local, Orr did not bear the fruit of his success as he had in Local 273. While the new members were admitted, their numbers were sufficiently small as to preclude any dramatic shift in union philosophy.

One incident of special note during Orr's time in the checkers' local was his one-man picket line in solidarity with the Harbour Police several years later in the early 1980s, a stand that flew in the face of the opinions of his peers and even legal sanction. While there was some friction between the harbour police and dockworkers over petty grievances, smoking in the sheds, parking tickets and the like, this did not bother Orr. While most of his fellow workers saw the harbour police as authority figures whose cause was alien to them and none of their concern, Orr saw the bigger picture and was the first to take a stand on the matter. Jimmy knew that by acting in solidarity with the police, he could help them, and besides, he would not "cross any man's picket line."⁶⁸ When Orr caught sight of the picket that Friday morning, he calmly declared that he would not cross it. Others tried to convince him that they were sanctioned to work, or that it was none of their concern. He listened, but remained steadfast. He did not try to sway them, for some were non-union men. Jimmy beseeched them not to jeopardize their own jobs, but flatly refused to go to work himself. This resulted in his suspension by the Employers' Association, which by his estimation, was "where they made their mistake."⁶⁹

"Good, that's fine," was Orr's verbal response to his suspension, but he would not be deterred. When someone needed help with a picket, he would volunteer his time

⁶⁸ Orr interview, 24 November 2005.

⁶⁹ Orr interview, 24 November 2005.

to help them however he could in order to get people back to the negotiating table. In a rare pragmatic moment, Orr also intoned that “if you cross someone else’s picket line, it makes it a lot easier for them to cross your picket line.”⁷⁰ Jimmy saw the trade union movement as a wider struggle for social justice. Even though the dock workers were not crossing the picket in order to take the harbour policemen’s jobs, they would still be weakening their stand and failing to share their collective power. To Orr, a picket was a picket, and they were all inviolable. It was in his dumpy old recliner, his habitual nest, stewing over his punishment that he decided on his course of action. In his own words, “a couple of whiskeys and I decided then that I’m gonna set up my own picket line.”⁷¹

Orr carved out an old cardboard chicken box and fashioned a sign which read “ILA member suspended for refusing to cross picket line,” a sign that he would keep under his bed for years after. His march down to the pier that Saturday morning “put the fat in the fire.” There soon developed a standoff between the harbour police, who had brought in their cars, and the regular police who were intent upon getting people back to work. A convoy of seven police cars, dozens of police and a crowd of officers including the union president, the ILA vice-president and the president of Orr’s local had assembled, threatening Orr with censure if he did not move out of the way. He held his sign and refused to budge, at which point the convoy of cruisers, lights flashing, sped past Orr and nearly struck him. He wasn’t “crazy enough to stand in front and get run over,” so he let the workers, few in number, pass.⁷²

⁷⁰ Orr interview, 24 November 2005.

⁷¹ Orr interview, 24 November 2005.

⁷² Orr interview, 24 November 2005.

The imposing figure of Jimmy Orr with his chicken box sign and ILA cap was a sight to behold. While before, his peers had crossed without a second thought, Orr's principled stand got people talking. "Well he's here," they remarked, and soon nobody was going in. It was the younger crowd, members of Jimmy's "Hundred Brats," who first came to his side, such as Pat Riley and other NULPA members, Fred Nice among them. The line had been breached around eleven thirty in the morning, but by twelve thirty or one o'clock the word had spread and a throng twenty strong had come to Orr's side, declaring "he's not going to be alone this afternoon." Orr's suspension and subsequent one-man picket would result in a wildcat strike that would settle the matter. They had already set up pickets on the West Side and were intent upon shutting down work entirely. The port remained shut down for five or six days before the strike was settled and Orr was reinstated. Content that his personal stand had gained a following and had brought the harbour police back to the bargaining table, Orr returned to work. When asked later in life, by Carol Ferguson, why he had taken this daunting stand, he replied with a single word: "principle."⁷³

Emboldened by the radical shift in the union and its ensuing successes, Orr and his allies pushed for further reforms on the waterfront. While Montreal had often proven to be a source of turmoil, it was also at times a source of inspiration. Saint John had lagged far behind the industry standards for hiring and had for some time been prone to corruption due to its retention of the archaic "shape-up system." On the West Coast, the much more radical International Longshore and Warehouse Union had achieved the hiring hall system, while on the East Coast, the computerized dispatch system on the

⁷³ Orr interview, 24 November 2005.

Saint Lawrence was an exception rather than a rule, save for the hiring halls put in place during the Second World War. Well into the 1980s, Saint John had retained the shape-up system of unregulated dockside hiring, which left workers, especially highbooters, open to all manner of corruption, be it kickbacks, nepotism or racketeering. It was also a source of ethnic cleavage, as the parochialism of Catholic/Protestant hiring had also remained an issue, though less extreme in comparison to practices in the United States.⁷⁴

Fred Nice described the process as going down to the docks to “beg for your job,” and he, along with Orr and Abel LeBlanc, were the architects of a new Saint John dispatch system, which would in some ways redeem itself for decades of lagging behind. Energized by their success with the NULPA and injected with new blood, they took further steps in their Herculean task of democratizing the ILA.⁷⁵ The system in Montreal was seen as the blueprint for the Saint John system, and through bargaining in 1983-84, a dispatch system was eventually put in place by 1985.⁷⁶ Its intent was to do away with the abuses of the shape-up while equalizing opportunity for work. Rules of acquiring work were put in place, as well as a system of advancement which would do away with the influence and abuse of the foremen, while equalizing access to all extra work.⁷⁷ Jimmy was a vocal proponent of this system and integral to the efforts to put it in place, despite the fact that it did not initially affect his own local, instead first coming into effect for Local 273.

⁷⁴ Orr interview, 24 November, 2005.

Howard Kimeldorf, *Reds or Rackets? The Making of Radical and Conservative Unions on the Waterfront*

(Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 15.

⁷⁵ Nice interview.

⁷⁶ Riley interview.

⁷⁷ Nice interview.

This achievement was taken a fortuitous step further in 1993 with the advent of the unique “10% Rule,” which further entrenched the equalization of opportunity. ILA 273 boasts that this measure is unique to them, so far as they are aware, and often evokes fascination from other unions when informed of this rule. Its intent is to minimize income inequality to no more than 10 per cent. No longer can individual companies woo workers with greater wages or benefits and turn a blind eye to the contract. Initially quarterly, but now monthly, the income opportunity of the various “basic work forces” are audited and those of varying size and opportunity transfer workers to other basic work forces so that gaps in income opportunity between work forces cannot exceed 10 per cent annually.⁷⁸ Of course, Fred Nice tempers this glowing endorsement with the fact that some longshoremen, especially the old schoolers set in their ways, make it difficult to maintain this 10 per cent rule, as those with greater training and mechanical skills can easily make more than those who prefer to be “brawns” or stick to their preferred type of work. Regardless, the system is unique and works well for the majority of members while representing a much touted sentiment that runs throughout Orr’s efforts.⁷⁹ While the reality of these “concrete utopias” rarely lived up to the stringent ideals of Jimmy, they were concrete steps in that direction and improved greatly on past practices.

Jimmy Orr was no stranger to confrontation, be it on the picket lines or scuffling at the K Mart over fresh hams every Saturday morning.⁸⁰ Another example of Orr’s resistance, this time to the dictates of the ILA international itself, took place a few years

⁷⁸ Riley interview.

⁷⁹ Nice interview.

⁸⁰ Nice interview.

later. He had attended several conventions on behalf of ILA 1764, in 1975, 1976 and 1983. In 1983, Orr had spoken to a member from Montreal who was intent on running for a vice-presidential position and had given him his word that he would nominate this individual. Perhaps naively, Orr thought nothing of it, as it was “a democratic thing, if somebody wanted to run.”⁸¹ Unfortunately, the gritty reality of union politics soon made itself painfully apparent. Once again, Orr would find that the glowing words of the charters meant very little to the powers that be and their fixation with entrenched power over democratic ideals. He had been warned against making his chosen nomination, but passed it off mostly as empty intimidation, replying with a flat “no.” Despite his knowledge of the shady history of the ILA in the United States, he did not suspect that it would end the way it did.⁸² While in his hotel room the night before the meeting, Orr was awoken by a knock at the door. Before he knew what was happening, the international’s goons were upon him. One of the individuals in question was a former boxer and struck Orr in the face, knocking “The Bear” off his feet, at which point the assailant jumped upon Orr’s ankle and broke it very quickly. The professionalism of the assault was evident.⁸³ Orr claims to have suffered a broken ankle, nose, cracked ribs and a few contusions. Needless to say, he did not make it to the vote the following day, for he was tied up in the American medical system. As Orr described it, he “left the convention in a wheelchair,” but his fighting spirit had not been subdued.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Riley interview.

⁸² Orr interview, 2 March 2006.

⁸³ Riley interview.

⁸⁴ Orr interview, 2 March 2006.

Another vein within the Canadian labour movement, which appeared during the 1970s, was a growing nationalist sentiment and a move towards to Canadianization of labour unions. In addition to the economic crises of the 1970s in the United States which failed to “deliver the goods” for Canadian unions and made Canadianization an “economic, social, political, national necessity,” the authors of a contemporary text point to many other factors that led to discontent with international unions and increased nationalist sentiment and calls for autonomy after this period.⁸⁵ In short, it became evident to many in Canada that the so-called International unions represented only two countries, Canada and the United States, but were both headquartered in and dominated by their neighbours south of the border. It was clear, from the experiences of the 1970s, that in a crunch situation, American interests would trump those of Canadians and Canadian nationalism was seen as a threat, while US protectionism was seemingly acceptable. American unions were out of touch, and at times antagonistic, towards the interests of Canadians, who felt alienated and subordinated. Furthermore, during this period Canadian unionization, greatly bolstered by the advent of public sector unions such as the Canadian Union of Public Employees and the Public Service Alliance of Canada, far outstripped new organizing in the United States, which was comparatively entrenched and immobile.⁸⁶ More than a million new unionists were registered in Canada in a decade, mostly in Canadian public sector unions which were increasingly coming to the fore.⁸⁷ By 1985, nationalist sentiment at large was coming to fruition

⁸⁵ Robert Laxer; Paul Craven; Anne Martin, *Canada's Unions* (Toronto: J. Lorimer, 1976), 296, 307

⁸⁶ Laxer, 296-8, 300.

⁸⁷ David Frank, “Why Us? The Campaign Against Wage Controls in Saint John, New Brunswick, 1975-76,” in Marie Hammond-Callaghan and Matthew Hayday (eds.) *Mobilizations, Protests and Engagements: Canadian Perspectives on Social Movements* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2008), 213.

through breakaways, mergers, independent unions and a rejection of business unionism. The formation of the Canadian Paperworkers' Union and the Canadian Auto Workers in 1974 and 1985 are prime examples. The revival of the rank-and-file was seen as key to the development of Canadian labour with calls for greater union democracy, rank-and-file control and social unionism, a politically minded philosophy of solidarity.⁸⁸

Perhaps the most glaring injustice, especially from Saint John's perspective, were the formal mechanisms of control over Canadian locals. The threat of trusteeship, loss of property and the necessity of "groveling" for funds from US head offices was intolerable to Canadian firebrands. Internationals had a great deal of sway over the success of Canadian branches' strikes, which were more dynamic than their American brethren, by withholding funds, ordering workers back and the imposition of trusteeship.⁸⁹ ILA 273 was acquainted with a less than forthcoming International, as its entreaties for legal aid in 1972 went ignored.⁹⁰ They would also become re-acquainted with the mechanisms of trusteeship, evoking the legacy of 1949. Canada was the only country in the world without its own national labour movement and the passive acceptance of US dominated internationals simply because "they're already here" gave way to rebellion.⁹¹

It is evident from the proceedings of the 1975 ILA convention, which Orr attended, that Canadian interests were not a matter of debate. In fact, the agenda was dominated by discussions of US energy prices and foreign policy, boycotts of grain

⁸⁸ Laxer, 306, 309-10.

⁸⁹ Laxer, 298, 300.

⁹⁰ Dosman, 34.

⁹¹ Laxer, 303.

shipments to the USSR, in addition to denouncing the strategy of détente, comparing the Soviet Union to the Nazis and branding Soviet sailors as security threats. In fact, it appears that the only time that Canadian delegates spoke was during the nomination process. The only direct references to Canadian issues were a passing reference to recent back-to-work legislation in Quebec during the nomination of Norman Quigley as 16th vice-president and John Campbell of Nova Scotia, now 13th vice-president, announcing his eagerness to work with President Gleason on “Canadian issues.”⁹² It is evident from Orr’s experience at the 1983 convention that the senior leadership of the international was much more concerned with silencing debate on these “Canadian issues” and subordinating them to American aims.

At the ILA International Convention in 1987 Pat Riley presented the results of a nationwide referendum of Canadian locals which overwhelmingly called for the election of their International officers by secret ballot in order to allow for more local control. The aim was not to bolt the ILA, but rather to democratize it, purging the influence of organized crime, an element thought to be foreign to trade unionism, and to provide for more local autonomy from far off decision making bodies. Unsurprisingly, the International did not want upstart locals to “rock the boat” and went behind closed doors, later telling Riley and his followers that they were not invited to come to the microphones or to debate. After insisting on doing so, they found that all manner of tactics were used, such as intimidation or turning off their microphones.⁹³ Attempting to debate and presenting their evidence was a fruitless task Orr would later muse that “they

⁹² International Longshoremen’s Association, Proceedings of the 43rd Convention and the 83rd Anniversary Program, 21-24 July 1975, James W. Orr Fonds, Box 11.

⁹³ Riley interview.

had their own way of doing things, unfortunately it was the wrong way.”⁹⁴ Not discouraged, the group left vowing to continue its efforts.

They were, however, “thrown a bone” and given the Canadian Dock and Marine Council, a communication network for all Canadian locals and a means to consult with the International, but with no funding or right to do anything except liaise, and certainly not bargain independently. They met in Toronto in 1988 and Riley was elected president, evolving to the point where it seemed prudent to include the other major longshoremen’s union, the much more radical ILWU of the West Coast. This inflamed the conservative ILA leadership, already wary of the upstart Canadians. The intent was to show that the CDMC spoke for and represented all of Canada’s longshoremen, the ILA in the East and the ILWU in the West, with an alternating presidency between the two coasts. The next step was to win the approval of ILA locals for this merger of sorts, which the International office was intent on stopping. The logical policy was fairly well received, but in keeping with the daily reality of the undemocratic workings of the ILA in New York, there was intrigue and buttonholing behind the scenes. Jimmy’s own local, and the also the shipliners’ local were convinced to abstain from the vote, a tactic widely employed in the International’s attempt to stifle the referendum. Some did not see the matter as urgent, as it was widely assumed that the locals would be on board, while others, such as the Quebec locals, could not attend for financial reasons. The day before the vote, Riley was visited by Secretary-Treasurer of the Atlantic Coast District Bobby Gleason and the vice-president from New Jersey, later removed from office for his organized crime connections, who informed him that (ILA President) “Mr. (John)

⁹⁴ Orr interview, 2 March 2006.

Bowers is not in favour of the proposal” and warned the CDMC president that he should not proceed. Perturbed, Riley consulted with his mentor, Jimmy, that evening. Neither was moved by the subtle intimidation and it was decided that the vote would proceed as planned. “If they had us outgunned, then so be it, we would do what we believed.”⁹⁵

Unfortunately, others were less obdurate in the face of International pressure and the vote tied. After some momentary contemplation, Riley turned to Orr for advice. Orr had done his homework once again.⁹⁶ The two slogged through the International rules and discovered a means to win the day. Ironically, just as Orr loathed the strictures of the educational establishment, yet always did his own homework, he harbored a disdain for bureaucracy but was more than willing to immerse himself in it if he could use its technicalities to his advantage. While he often resorted to direct action or obstruction, “getting them going,” Orr had grown up in the milieu of industrial legality and had integrated it into his own strategies, then taught others to do the same. He would reflect on the shift from direct action to legality later in life: “Today you don’t need anybody with baseball bats and a pistol in their belt. They need a good accountant or economist working for ya.”⁹⁷ The International’s rules declared that in the event of a tie, the president of the council could cast the deciding vote. The opportunity to do so was seized immediately and Riley voted to bring in the ILWU.⁹⁸

It was at this point that “all hell broke loose.” The International representatives stormed out, but the upstart Canadians were not bothered, and perhaps a bit giddy on the

⁹⁵ Riley interview.

⁹⁶ Riley interview.

⁹⁷ Orr interview, 2 March 2006.

⁹⁸ Riley interview.

inside, carrying on as if nothing had happened. In the weeks to come several locals seceded from the council, such as the Halifax checkers and longshoremen, the checkers of Montreal and a local from Hamilton, but the CDMC still held a firm majority which included the Montreal longshoremen, the largest local in the country, and boasted being able to speak for longshoremen nationwide. The International and others would send representatives hoping to hold another vote, hoping to swing the Nova Scotia maintenance workers' union, the only representation left in the province, but to no avail. The council had moved on, and in time, many would be readmitted. It has since evolved into the Canadian Labour Maritime Workers Council, an effective lobbying vehicle headed by Pat Riley, who has a great deal of gratitude to his mentor Jimmy, for his "counsel during difficult times."⁹⁹

Nonetheless, the Canadian locals' grappling with New York was far from over, and Orr's own role as mentor and agitator was not yet exhausted. Next came a struggle branded by the International as "a breakaway movement," but which was in fact an attempt to withstand an onslaught of attacks by New York to put the defiant Saint John locals into trusteeship. In 1990, after the debacle over involving the ILWU and the CDMC, ILA local 375, the Montreal longshoremen, decided to leave the ILA in favor of CUPE. One of their members, Theo Beaudoin later told Pat Riley that the CDMC issue was the last straw: "that did it for me, Pat, that's sneaky business." In addition to its rebellion against the wishes of New York, ILA 273 was charged with encouraging local 375 to leave and put under trusteeship, including Pat Riley's position. A Disciplinary Committee was appointed, headed by the ILA General Organizer, Anthony Pimpinella,

⁹⁹ Riley interview.

yet another higher-up later expelled for connections to organized crime, who as it later turned out was a “made” member of the Gambino crime family, and who used Gambino family lawyers in the attempt to quell the Canadian locals’ resistance with a show of authority.¹⁰⁰

The first case would unravel rather quickly. Riley and company were called to answer before the Disciplinary Committee. The tactic that New York decided to go with was to recruit a member of the Halifax local to offer up false testimony, scripted by the International, of alarming statements allegedly made to him by one Pat Riley. Thankfully, when Vice-President David Quinn accosted the witness at the airport in order to coach him before the hearing, he flatly refused to spread this misinformation and backed out. The case fell flat.¹⁰¹

Trusteeship was a common tactic often employed to stifle US locals, and the leadership would continue to wield it as a club in order to try to force the Canadians into submission. Fortunately for Pat Riley, he had the counsel of the veteran Orr, who aided him in formulating a strategy to keep the International at bay. While the locals had to abide by ILA laws, the ILA itself was in an awkward position in that it had to abide by Canadian labour laws. Jimmy, once again the reluctant bureaucrat, conspired with Riley to involve the Canadian Labour Congress to use its processes in order to protect themselves. The process in question was a “claim for justification,” a common means by which Canadian unions, such as the CAW, broke free of their international parents, and which would cement the “breakaway movement” narrative in the minds of New York.

¹⁰⁰ Riley interview.

¹⁰¹ Riley interview.

They were successful and were granted the right to bolt the ILA if they chose to do so. Ultimately, it was decided that the locals would remain in the ILA, not only for the purpose of attempting to reform it from within, but also due to financial concerns. If they were to leave, the treasury would be drained and pensions threatened; the entrenched Saint John locals would have to start over at square one, losing a great deal of their clout and leaving themselves vulnerable.¹⁰²

Orr would be tormented for the rest of his days over the decision of whether or not to leave, himself harboring some willingness to do so. Riley, while grateful for Orr's counsel, was far less reckless than his mentor. While Riley, sympathetic to the lessons of *The Art of War*, was unwilling to fight a battle that he could not win, Orr's idealism at times bordered upon self-destructive. Riley was often more cautious, for example, not willing to put up pickets that would not be respected, for "it's not good to see a picket line up and to see everybody streaming through it." Orr was a risk taker and unafraid of the odds. His protégé would describe him as "principled to the point where he didn't really care about all of the other factors at play, like dollars and cents. If it meant that his union treasury would be drained, and you'd have to start all over again, then that's the way Jimmy would look at it."¹⁰³

At this point, the Saint John locals had proven to New York that they could not be controlled like their American brethren and would not be beholden to them. The initial claim for justification, while asserting their autonomy and exhibiting their perpetual option of seceding, was not sufficient to keep the International at arm's length.

¹⁰² Riley interview.

¹⁰³ Riley interview.

It was itself somewhat controversial even in Saint John, where some members continued to pledge allegiance to the ILA for varying reasons, most largely out of tradition, for many of their fathers and grandfathers had been members, and that was the way it had always been for one of the “oldest bona fide” unions in Canada. While the reformists still boasted a clear majority of 77 per cent, there were pockets of resistance which colluded with New York in order to unseat the radical leadership..

The next volley came a few years later, and would be fomented from the inside. While the battle for hegemony had been won by the Hundred Brats, internal enemies remained. A certain individual, who shall remain nameless, charged the leadership of ILA 273 with carrying out undemocratic elections, as he was denied the right to run as a candidate, and chose to involve New York. The International seized upon the case, which was of dubious merit, and sent a letter threatening once again to put ILA 273 into trusteeship, as well as ILA 1764, as it had supported their position. Riley and company went to great lengths to explain the situation, pointing to the local’s by laws that stipulated that for one to run as a candidate, one must attend at least fifty per cent of union meetings. The individual in question had been out on disability for years and was not the type to frequent the meetings. When this was proven insufficient, they then tried to prove that this was a widely accepted practice everywhere, but the testimony of the local Labour Council as well as that of the checkers’ union of Montreal to this effect was equally fruitless. The inner coterie of New York relished another opportunity to censure the firebrands in Saint John.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Riley interview.

Once again, the previous tried and true strategy concocted with Orr's advice of involving the CLC was employed, but this time Jimmy would engage in a bit of the comical obstructionism he was known for. This time the head of the Disciplinary Committee was John Baker, who did not have any connections to organized crime, and who did not attempt to use the past tactics of intimidation and subterfuge, which had proven to be an abject failure. While the hearing would result in a decree to hold new elections, Orr would not miss the opportunity to "get them going." As Fred Nice, has attested, Jimmy was a little less than punctual, a trait that had always bothered him about his eccentric peer. His arrival at the Trade and Convention Centre was no exception, and he would use this to his advantage. The comical sight of "The Bear" lumbering into the proceedings was enough to catch everybody's attention, at which point he bellowed, in his deep barrel voice: "What's going on here? Did this meeting start early? Oh... I guess not." Having disrupted the hearing, he went on, just to be difficult, demanding to know if everybody present was a member. When it was explained that the union tickets had not been checked, "The Burr" acted as the gadfly and continued to stir up the room, referring to the New York representatives with his own socialist vernacular. "Comrade! Comrade!" he blustered, to the incredulity of John Baker, who replied angrily "I am not your comrade!" Unfazed, Jimmy baited him further by replying: "Well I'll have you know that in Canada, all of the Royal Canadian Legions use comrade, do you got something to say about the Royal Canadian Legion?" While the results of the hearing were not altered, Orr refused to go down without making it exceedingly difficult and frustrating, giving "the boys from New York" a dose

of their own obstructionist medicine.¹⁰⁵ During other hearings, he also had a tendency to call directly to the convention floor and berate the international officers in the middle of the session, these antics leading them, and especially Gleason, to whom he regularly gave an earful, to hate the boisterous troublemaker. Needless to say, “The Bear” would make his presence known and his rivals would loathe having to deal with him. Nice recalled how Orr’s presence commanded attention, for “you’d swear he had a microphone wrapped around his neck!”¹⁰⁶

New elections were held in 1998, but the conclusion was a forgone one. It became evident that their opponents had been “talking through their hats.” The individual in question ran against the existing 273 president, Fred Nice, who was re-elected by an overwhelming margin. Another had intended to run against Pat Riley for the position of secretary-treasurer, but backed out at the last minute, seeing the futility of the venture and making the “new elections” look like the pointless interference that they were.

New York was still not satisfied and would return for one more assault shortly thereafter, resulting in yet another “dog and pony show.” This time the complaint came from within the shipliners’ local. An individual claiming to have been the one “instrumental” in preventing ILA 273 from leaving the parent union in 1990 while he was president of the shipliners’ local, claimed to have majority support and lodged missives to New York complaining that 273 and 1764 would not accept transfers. Fortunately for Orr and his coterie, this individual neither had the majority support he

¹⁰⁵ Riley interview.

¹⁰⁶ Nice interview.

boasted of, nor did he “know what he was talking about.” The reason for refusing to accept transfers was a simple one, as it would have to involve a Joint Manpower Committee and the employer. Once again, the ILA proved to be impervious to reason and set in motion the same old process of threatening trusteeship. The Saint John locals applied for protection under the CLC umbrella again, resulting in another hearing in Ottawa with Don Holder, of the Canadian Paperworkers’ Union, who, acting as adjudicator, asked for a petition from the locals proving that the majority were in favor of leaving the ILA. The result of this petition was an overwhelming 90 per cent, but once again it was decided to stay and try to reform the organization internally. The matter of transfers then went before an arbitration committee headed by Professor Tom Kuttner, of the University of New Brunswick law school in Fredericton, who maintained that the unions had no right to accept transfers without a Joint Manpower Committee and the involvement and agreement of the employer, which had been evident from the beginning.¹⁰⁷

The repeated attempts by New York to subdue the Canadian rebels were met with consistent defeat, due in no small part to the unconventional maneuverings of people like Jimmy Orr and his Hundred Brats. While on several occasions they had come close to seceding from the international, the disadvantages proved to outweigh the apparent merits. As long as they felt comfortable in their ability to ward off New York’s grievances, they would stay in the ILA and attempt to change it from within through the Longshore Workers’ Commission, a caucus within the International devoted to

¹⁰⁷ Riley interview.

reform.¹⁰⁸ Many members still remain perplexed as to whether or not the choice to stay was the correct one, no less the elderly Orr. He would remain puzzled and unsatisfied with the outcome. Jimmy was less concerned about the union treasury and more with his own ideals, which had been bone shatteringly rebuked in Miami. He was also unsatisfied with the role of the CLC, which while providing them a security blanket he could not help but feel that they could have done more to defend the Canadian locals, although he admitted to perhaps being a minority on that subject.¹⁰⁹ Riley recalls that this issue bothered him for the remainder of his life.¹¹⁰

The case of Jimmy Orr is an instructive one. It is proof of the potential impact of the proverbial “anonymous local militant.” While Orr initially made some headway in union politics, it was immediately clear that any real advancement was impossible due to his far left views and idealism, for he was “too against the system.” With that in mind, the firebrand became intent on changing that very system from within. While he cannot be dubbed a leader in the formal sense, a quandary he no doubt was unmoved by, the fact that he, along with Nice and young bloods such as Pat Riley, were able to cause such a dramatic shift in the makeup of the Saint John locals is significant. Furthermore, his role as a mentor for the “new blood” and the fact that they, with his tutelage, were to become the next generation of Saint John labour leaders, and that the bulk of the locals would eventually come around to support them, is evidence of the impact of the unsung rank-and-file agitator. Pat Riley would become the longstanding Business Agent of ILA 273, while Abel LeBlanc and Fred Nice would both come to enjoy long stints at the

¹⁰⁸ Riley interview.

¹⁰⁹ Orr interview, 2 March 2006.

¹¹⁰ Riley interview.

Presidency and terms on the union executive; LeBlanc would be elected a Member of the province's Legislative Assembly from Saint John in 2003 and 2006. A seemingly isolated coterie would eventually be vindicated and would restore confidence in the renewal of one of Canada's oldest, and for some time, most old fashioned, unions.

The rest of Orr's life proved to be no less prolific, and while he was denied serious professional advancement in the International, he busied himself with many mostly volunteer positions and continued to work tirelessly for his ideals and for working people everywhere. Always reciprocally encouraged by his Hundred Brats to take a more active leadership role, he would occasionally come to the forefront and become involved in several organizations. He briefly held the presidency of ILA 1764 for a term in the mid-1990s, elected by acclamation because no one else would take the reins.¹¹¹ He was also talked into being the head of the Saint John District Waterfront Council, a collection of five locals that represented the port, until its disbanding in 1994 due to several of the locals ceasing to exist and before the three major unions were eventually merged into the Local 273 in 2000, at which point Jimmy would finally become a member of the union he had so often assisted. Jimmy also involved himself with the Saint John District Labour Council from 1970 to 1998, with varying levels of involvement, acting as a trustee. He also sat on the Saint John Port Development Commission from 1983 to 1993, and after his retirement in 2001, was appointed a Director of the Port Authority after a comical episode wherein Pat Riley assisted him in compiling his first resumé, upon which he insisted on including his membership in the

¹¹¹ Correspondence with Pat Riley, 4 June 2014.

“Australian Order of Old Bastards,” which he had gained through fraternal international alliances, of which he would make many throughout his career.¹¹²

¹¹² Riley interview; Jimmy Orr’s resumé [2007], copy provided by Pat Riley.

Chapter Three:

“A Local With Guts!”

Jimmy Orr, Globalization and Solidarity

Orr's existence was a spartan one. His shared apartment, furnished with his infamous old chair, a plaid pattern couch, an old Hi-Fi used as a cabinet, a lamp for reading, a black and white television and, most strikingly, his refrigerator. This refrigerator was itself nothing special, but it was plastered with protest and boycott stickers from over the years, the door of which was preserved after Orr's passing. He was very proud of this small monument to solidarity, joking that “If that damn CLC boycotts one more thing you won't be able to get anything to eat!” While Orr often shied away from the spotlight, the effects of his actions reverberated well beyond his modest dwelling and his

acts of solidarity, be they moral or concrete, touched the lives of workers as distant as Argentina and Australia.

Much had changed since Orr's working career began and the hardwon system of industrial legality was on the defensive by the later years of his career. Industrial Saint John had declined once again, losing a great deal of its infrastructure, such as the sugar refinery, one of the city's breweries, the dry dock and the Northern Electric plant.¹ West Saint John had lost the hustle and bustle of Orr's youth, with most of its mom and pop shops and neighbourhood landmarks swept away, replaced by pawn shops and abandoned buildings.² There would always be problems, but despite the rough edges the willingness to tackle problems remained persistent. Globally speaking, outsourcing, downsizing, rationalizing and "restructuring" of industry was the rule, often to the detriment of trade unions and common people in general. Capitalism seemed to reign supreme and had become a global, transnational force. The Fordism of Orr's heyday gave way to a regressive doctrine of neoliberalism, often termed an "assault on working people," and the gains of Orr's generation were, and continue to be, threatened.³ The recent narrative of cooperation had given way to coercion as the balance of power between labour and capital had shifted back in favour of the latter resulting in a stagnation or decline in working people's standards and a weakening in trade union rights and strength. However, there would be cracks in the monolith, and workers the world over would come into contact with one another as well, resulting in both local and

¹ Pat Riley, interview by author, Saint John, NB, 23 May 2013, tape recording and transcript in possession of author.

² *2001 Saint John City Directory* (Livonia: Equifax, 2001), 200.

³ Thom Workman, *If You're In My Way, I'm Walking: The Assault on Working People Since 1970* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2009), 2.

international solidarities to challenge this hegemony. Jimmy Orr was, as he always had been in Saint John, a piece of this complex tapestry of protest.

While rarely reported on, one could often find Orr among the crowds or behind the scenes in these changing times. An event of both local and national note was the 1976 “Day of Protest,” otherwise known as the Saint John General Strike, undertaken to protest the wage controls imposed by the federal government in October 1975. Bill C-73 has been seen by many, including Canadian Union of Public Employees activist Raymond Léger ; as the “most vicious attack on labour since the legalization of bargaining rights.”⁴ The controls were marketed as a remedy to rampant inflation, but their scope and enforcement, as evidenced by what George Vair has termed “the Ziggy Decision” and the rollback of the “Irving Settlement,” made it clear to labour activists that the controls were aimed at freezing wages and disrupting free collective bargaining, not at controlling skyrocketing prices.⁵ It became imperative to make it clear that they were aimed at working people and not at capital and that the Canadian labour movement would not stand idly by while its recent progress was erased. In Saint John, the trade union movement took the concept of the general strike seriously, and under George Vair, who became head of the Saint John and District Labour Council in 1976, and Larry Hanley of Local 601 of the Canadian Paperworkers’ Union, who was appointed as a fulltime organizer, a general strike was organized.⁶ David Frank has noted that the exceptional case of Saint John was no accident, as it was the direct result of a tireless

⁴ Raymond Léger, “October 14, 1976 - The Saint John General Strike,” <http://www.wfhatthewaylabourexcitecentre.ca>

⁵ George Vair, *The Struggle against Wage Controls: The Saint John Story, 1975- 1976* (St. John’s: Canadian Committee on Labour History, 2007), 36-7.

⁶ Leger, “Day of Protest”

organizing campaign conducted in the year leading up to the general strike. While the Canadian Labour Congress was mounting a national, albeit confusing, “Day of Protest,” some organizers, such as those in Saint John, took issue with the wider campaign’s “Why Me?” slogan, which made it sound too individualistic and “like we were crying,” instead opting for “Why Us?” and focusing on solidarity.⁷

Plans were put together by a small group of young, energetic and, by some accounts, naïve, activists. Jimmy Orr was one such activist and was a member of the SJDLC’s Wage Controls Committee, having recently been appointed as a Trustee of the Labour Council. While George Vair recalls that the committee itself had members come and go, and was later expanded to 15 members, Jimmy was one of the initial five members and his participation was consistent throughout. As a leader, Jimmy was expected to keep himself well informed on the situation and to use his own knowledge to get this across to others, which he certainly had the gift to do, though he shied away from volunteering to educate individual locals.⁸ He did, however, manage to get the message out, and is among those listed on a schedule of TV appearances for Cable Six as a part of the energetic media campaign leading up to the action itself.⁹ The Saint John activists took out ads in the newspapers, mounted a radio campaign, distributed countless pins, flyers and other materials and held rallies involving such figures as the United Auto Workers’ Bob White in order to energize Saint John activists and prepare

⁷ David Frank, “Why Us? The Campaign Against Wage Controls in Saint John, New Brunswick, 1975-76,” in Marie Hammond-Callaghan and Matthew Hayday (eds.) *Mobilizations, Protests and Engagements: Canadian Perspectives on Social Movements* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2008), 215, 218; George Vair, interview by author, Saint John, NB, 10 April 2014, tape recording and transcript in possession of author.

⁸ Vair interview.

⁹ TV appearances notes, James W. Orr Fonds, MC3465, Box 4, PANB.

them for the day of reckoning.¹⁰ Vair's own account of the campaign does an excellent job of making clear how the case of Saint John differed from the CLC's wider campaign of "Why Me?," instead opting for a more militant campaign focusing on the concept of solidarity. Orr fit comfortably into this niche and worked mostly behind the scenes to ensure that the Saint John action sent a powerful message to the powers that be.¹¹

On 14 October 1976, the anniversary of the wage and price controls, Orr would be pulled from the background in a time of need.¹² On the Day of Protest, four separate marches were organized to converge on King's Square for a rally and speeches at City Hall by labour leaders such as council president George Vair, Donald Montgomery of the CLC and Paul LePage of the New Brunswick Federation of Labour.¹³ George Vair himself was in charge of the West Side march, which began near the port. As Vair recalls, he was a bit disappointed with the foul weather and the less than anticipated turnout at his own area, though the others boasted strong showings. It seemed to him that many of the longshoremen had "rolled over and gone back to sleep."

This was well before the heyday of Orr and his Hundred Brats, but Jimmy was one of those who had gathered at the appointed area for the march. In one of the few formal mentions of Orr's activities, Vair, in his book on the event, made a note of how Orr stepped up to "lead protesters over the Harbour Bridge."¹⁴ A disturbance had occurred on the Reversing Falls Bridge involving a lifted car and some borrowed wires

¹⁰ Vair interview.

¹¹ Vair, *Struggle*, 109, 112.

¹² Riley interview.

¹³ Leger, "Day of Protest"; David Frank, *Provincial Solidarities: A History of the New Brunswick Federation of Labour* (Edmonton: Athabasca University Press, 2013), 150.

¹⁴ Vair, "Struggle," 113.

and Vair was summoned to the scene to keep order. Orr could always be counted on to be “the man on the ground” in a time of need and was left in charge of leading the group to the meeting spot. As George left the scene, he witnessed Jimmy come to the fore and command the contingent on with a boisterous call of “Okay, comrades! We’re moving out!”¹⁵

The Saint John activists had refused to get the proper parade permits, despite the insistence of the CLC, as it would severely limit their routes and tactics. The parade permits had actually become an inside joke at meetings when things became tense. In any event, they intended to block the streets, and Jimmy’s contingent was meant to cross the Harbour Bridge, which was without sidewalks and illegal for pedestrians.. They were stopped by police and diverted to an alternate route, but under Jimmy’s authority still managed to make entire streets impenetrable and made it to the converging point without further incident.¹⁶

Thanks to the tireless campaign of the Saint John activists, the Day of Protest proved to be “a great success.” It involved roughly 5,000 workers, while about 12,000 stayed off the job, as the city was all but shut down, an event deemed Saint John was among the few communities nationwide, such as Sudbury, Ontario, Sept-Iles, Québec, and Thompson, Manitoba, who had achieved a general strike for the Day of Protest and had shown “the true meaning of labour solidarity.”¹⁷ Orr would later reflect that “Saint John was one of the hotbeds in Canada at that time. We shut this city down proper. So I was involved in that... We shut the port down. The whole city shut down; the dry docks,

¹⁵ Vair interview.

¹⁶ Vair, “Struggle,” 114.

¹⁷ Leger, “Day of Protest.”

the pulp mills...everything pretty well...breweries, sugar refinery. It was a massive shutdown.”¹⁸

A comment made by Vair in a moment of frustration leading up to the protest would result in yet another outcome of the Day of Protest. After a popular local Liberal politician, Bob Higgins, tried to turn an Anti-Wage Control rally into a Liberal Party platform, George bellowed that “as long as we’ve got politicians like that in Fredericton, we’re in trouble! We need some labour people in there!”¹⁹ This comment certainly resonated with the provincial New Democratic Party at the time, which was seeking to gain a foothold in the upcoming 1978 elections and making alliances with the labour movement, gaining the support of most labour organizations in Saint John, with the exception of the building trades, who distanced themselves.²⁰ While the NDP at large drifted toward the centre in an attempt to garner middle class votes, the NB NDP fielded many labour figures and claimed to speak for “ordinary people.” It endeavoured to come as close as possible to having candidates in all ridings and was scrambling for nominees. Among the roster was David Brown, a young union lawyer, Larry Hanley, the chief organizer of the 1976 Day of Protest and others, including truck drivers, social workers and students.²¹

Jimmy Orr accepted a nomination in the Saint John West riding, to run against the former provincial Progressive Conservative Minister of Labour, Rodman Logan, who had supported wage controls and, by some accounts, “talked out of both sides of his

¹⁸ Jimmy Orr, interview by Carol Ferguson, Saint John, NB, 2 March 2006, Labour History in New Brunswick Fonds, MC3477 MS4A18, PANB.

¹⁹ Vair, “Struggle,” 62.

²⁰ *Saint John Evening Times-Globe*, 5 October 1978.

²¹ *Saint John Evening Times-Globe*, 5 October 1978, 6 October 1978, 10 October 1978, 18 October 1978.

mouth” at the time.²² Though he did not realize it then, George Vair had been the impetus behind Orr’s candidacy, as Jimmy later joked that “that son of a bitch made me do it!” Evidently Vair’s heated comment and later support had rung true with Orr, who answered the call when needed and was announced as a last-minute nominee at the final meeting before the candidacy deadline.²³

Orr’s platform was straightforward: “we have sent to Fredericton lawyers, doctors, and wealthy businessmen to represent the working people of this province and far too often they have represented the interests of the rich and not the interests of the workers. This time we should send labour to do labour’s job.”²⁴ Among his policies was a clear message: “NO MORE WAGE CONTROLS.” He also advocated the development of inshore fisheries on the Bay of Fundy, the removal of taxes on building materials so as to stimulate construction job creation and tighter controls on industrial pollution. The NDP’s message was a call for jobs first and profits second.²⁵

While Orr was not elected, and in fact no NDP candidate had been to date, but he received a strong showing in his own riding, well above past results and a figure that surprised even his competitors. Jimmy received a “very large” proportion of the vote comparatively with 886 votes, or 12 percent in his riding, which had not run an NDP candidate in the previous election. In other Saint John ridings, David Brown received 11 per cent while Hanley garnered a not insignificant 20 per cent. When reached for comment after the results came in, Orr said they were “looking good, I’m very

²² Vair, “Struggle,” 89.

²³ Vair interview.

²⁴ “Vote James Orr” (pamphlet 1978), James W. Orr Fonds, Box 3.

²⁵ Election Supplement, James W. Orr Fonds, Box 3.

gratified.” While the NDP received only 6.5 per cent of the provincial vote, it was an improvement from the 2.9 per cent in the 1974 election and a signal that the “new” party was gaining ground in the province. Orr pronounced that “if anyone thinks the NDP is going to blow away now that the election is over then he’d better think again!” He went on to say that the NDP was “here to stay in New Brunswick” and that the next task was to find out if there was “a strong party base in Saint John.”²⁶ In 1982, Brown and Hanley gained more support, garnering 22 and 24 percent, respectively, while Orr’s old Saint John West riding, under Barry Robson, took home almost 13 per cent of the vote. After 1978, the provincial NDP continued to garner modest support, culminating in the election of its first MLA, Bob Hall in Tantramar in 1982 and Peter Trites in Saint John in 1984 and, finally, Elizabeth Weir, in 1988, who held office for a Saint John riding until 2005. Though he did not run again, Orr would continue his support for the NDP in the years to come, sending messages of support and donations to candidates and being invited to garden parties and gatherings, keeping in touch with those involved. He would also receive a signed election poster from Elizabeth Weir which read: “To Jimmie, Best Wishes, We’re going to do it! [sic] Love Elizabeth Weir.”²⁷

As evidenced by his refrigerator, Orr supported innumerable causes. His personal files were replete with protest pamphlets, boycott lists and thank you letters. César Chavez, who had visited Moncton in 1975,²⁸ enjoyed Orr’s moral support as he campaigned for boycotting California grapes and lettuce over suppression of the United

²⁶ *Saint John Evening Times-Globe*, 24 October 1978.

²⁷ Invitation to Garden Party by President of Saint John West NDP Riding Association, 1986; Update Letter to NDP Supporters from Glen McGuire, 1988, James W. Orr Fonds, Box 3; Signed Elizabeth Weir Campaign Poster, James. W. Orr Fonds, Box 16.

²⁸ Frank, *Solidarities*, 145.

Farm Workers. Orr had also supported the United Food and Commercial Workers women fish packers strike against Star Kist in 1980 over wage increases and everyday indignities, such as having to ask permission to leave the line to use the washroom. There was also a wide ranging Sobeys boycott the same year over ham-fisted negotiating tactics used against the newly unionized Dalhousie store. Next, he supported the Ban the Can campaign (1985-88) and the 1985 Eaton's strike. He had also supported CUPE's rejection of Bill 65 to amend the Industrial Relations Act in 1988, which called for further bureaucratization of labour relations and which would "paralyze labour." The 1989 Save the VIA Rail campaign was also close to Jimmy's heart, as his family had a long history of working the rails. He personally circulated a petition for this cause. He also supported the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers' Union Local 691 against the Irvings in 1996 when the company sought to drive the union out of the oil refinery.²⁹

Orr had also assisted in campaigns that had more global implications, such as Brian Mulroney's free trade policies in the 1980s and early 1990s, becoming involved in the Council of Canadians, occasionally attending meetings or Chairperson Maude Barlow's appearances when she was in town. Orr also helped organize a wildcat strike in protest, as evidenced by his handwritten notes on a personal appeal from Val Rak, a laid off Pittsburgh Paints factory employee from Ontario, which read "WILDCAT tomorrow at C. Carg- G.A. Burke- help needed at noon hour," once again exhibiting his on the ground duties.³⁰ Orr also wrote letters of protest to such figures as F.S. Eaton, the

²⁹ Assorted Protest Flyers, James W. Orr Fonds, Box 3.

³⁰ Personal appeal from Val Rak with Handwritten Notes, 12 May 1989, James W. Orr Fonds, Box 3.

Canada-wide retail magnate, in 1985 regarding a labour dispute. Eaton clearly had not read what Orr had written, judging by the scripted “thank you for your support” response which called the union liars. He also wrote representatives of Ganong’s chocolate regarding their joint venture in Thailand, which was curtly explained with references to “the reality of globalization” and “cost effectiveness” and an attempt to placate him with a box of chocolates.³¹ This so-called “reality” of globalization meant little to the idealistic Orr, who, to borrow a phrase from Ian McKay, was prey to the “delusion” that another world was possible.³²

Not limiting his sympathies to the trade union movement, Orr was recognized by the Canadian Peace Alliance in 1989 for “building public pressure to stop the purchase of nuclear subs” and to “help turn the country into a world leader for peace and the prevention of nuclear war. He also actively opposed South African Apartheid in 1990 and the American Helms-Burton Act of commercial and economic blockade against Cuba,³³

Perhaps Orr’s greatest contribution, as well as his most publicized and in his own mind proudest moment, was his involvement in the 1979 NO CANDU for Argentina campaign. This was a campaign to free political prisoners and halt the sale of Canadian CANDU nuclear reactors to the military junta which had taken power in Argentina, and with whom the Canadian government seemed to have no qualms in dealing in nuclear

³¹ Letter from F.S. Eaton to J. Orr, 14 March 1985; Letter from Ganong to J. Orr, 13 February 1998, James W. Orr Fonds, Box 3.

³² Ian McKay, *Rebels, Reds, Radicals: Rethinking Canada’s Left History* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2005), 3.

³³ Protest Flyers and Certificate of Recognition from Canadian Peace Alliance to James W. Orr, 15 May 1989, James W. Orr Fonds, Box 3.

technology. The involvement of the Saint John ILA also flew in the face of the International's markedly right-wing history and proved once again that the Canadian locals would do things their own way.

The ILA itself was no stranger to boycotts, but it was a union that, especially given its corruption and organized crime connections. In its distant history, likely unknown to its membership in the 1970s, was the 1919 Seattle dockworkers' strike, where the longshoremen refused to load the "death ship" of armaments destined for Admiral Kolchak's White Russian counterrevolutionaries, resulting in the shipment falling into the hands of the Red Army by the time it arrived. A representative of the ILA at this time confided that a majority of the men had been carrying the Wobbly red card.³⁴ After these radicals bolted the ILA in 1937 under "Red Harry" Bridges, the ILA settled into the conservatism that was a marked contrast with the radicalism of the ILWU. While the ILWU was boycotting shipments to fascist states, the ILA was sharing convention platforms with fervent supporters of Hitler and Mussolini. These tendencies would clearly affect the politically motivated work actions that the respective unions chose to take. In the 1950s, the ILWU would refuse to load a young Ronald Reagan's baggage, dismissing him as "that anti-communist!" After Reagan's ascent to executive power in the 1981, they would continue to boycott his right-wing client states, such as South Africa, Chile and El Salvador. The ILA was as conservative as the ILWU was radical. They, in keeping with their anti-communist tradition, boycotted the cargo bound for Communist states, initially the USSR and China, but later Vietnam as well.³⁵ It was

³⁴ Howard Kimeldorf, *Reds or Rackets? The Making of Radical and Conservative Unions on the Waterfront* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 30.

³⁵ Kimeldorf, ix.

this very clear tradition that made the work stoppage in Saint John in 1979 so startling to some observers, but as in 1949, there were always exceptions.

The Saint John longshoremen were drawn into the fold late in the game partially by chance but mostly due to the dogged and protracted campaign by a group of Argentinean expatriates intent upon opposing the military junta in their homeland. The Group for the Defence of Civil Rights in Argentina (GDCRA), operating out of Ontario, had long pleaded with the Canadian government to halt its warm economic relationship with the junta and to put pressure on the regime by halting its sales of nuclear reactors and associated materials. The Canadian government, itself aware of the situation in Argentina, had been in the process of selling CANDU nuclear reactors to the Peronist government, and was unfazed by the rise of the murderous junta, refusing to cancel the deals despite the fact that the government that they had finalized them with had been all but erased and replaced by a military dictatorship. The External Affairs Minister, Donald Jamieson, “refused to link trade issues with human rights” and favoured a “business as usual” approach to dealings with Argentina. When confronted with the situation, Ross Campbell, head of Atomic Energy of Canada Limited, replied that: “Business is business and human rights are human rights, and in any event, if Canada pulled out of the deal the sale would only go to West Germany.”³⁶

After diplomacy had failed, it became evident to expatriate activists such as Enrique Tabak that if the Canadian government must be confronted with action. It was at this point that the NO CANDU campaign was born. The committee set to tracking the

³⁶ George Vair, No Hot Cargo, <http://www.wfhatthewaylabourexhibitcentre.ca>

shipments of heavy water necessary for the continued functioning of Argentina's CANDU reactors and eventually zeroed in upon their point of departure: the port of Saint John. George Vair has written an invaluable blow-by-blow account of the planning and execution of the campaign and in it he notes the crucial role of Tabak in appealing to a New Brunswick Federation of Labour convention in an impassioned speech.³⁷ Unfortunately, the recording of the speech has not survived, but it has been described as powerful and evidently successful in garnering not only sympathy but concrete support for his cause. He described the situation in his country: a rogue military regime which had effectively demolished both civil and trade union rights, engaged in the mass murder of the opposition and had "disappeared" or jailed countless political prisoners. A perhaps lesser known element of the story was that the campaign in Argentina was effectively a "surgical strike" against the trade union movement and an attempt to uproot the dominant leftist culture of the region, murdering and jailing workers, unionists, students, social workers and soup kitchen volunteers for their beliefs.³⁸ In fact, 70 per cent of the victims were trade unionists.³⁹ The bloody years of the junta can be encapsulated by the chilling discovery in 1987 of the former torture chambers and the bones of murdered leftists within the wall of one of Argentina's plushiest malls, the Galerías Pacifico. While the torturers in Argentina's camps sought to force their prisoners to "do irreparable damage to the part of themselves that believed in helping others above all else" and to make them succumb "to the cutthroat ethos at the heart of laissez faire capitalism," Argentina's radical historian Osvaldo Bayer maintained that

³⁷ Vair, "Cargo"

³⁸ Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2008), 115, 121.

³⁹ Vair, "Cargo"

“the only transcendental theology [was] solidarity.”⁴⁰ When the GDCRA in Canada reached out for help, it received it from a variety of sources, including the rank-and-file longshoremen of Saint John, who defied the orders of both the reluctant union leadership, which ordered them back to work, and their employers, in order to show their solidarity with the working people of Argentina.⁴¹

When the campaign suddenly focused on the seemingly inconsequential port of Saint John, the longshoremen of Local 273 did their part. Had the matter been raised at a union meeting, it might well have been ruled out of order, but because Tabak had appealed to the Federation of Labour, the campaign had gained traction. The New Brunswick Federation of Labour convention adopted Emergency Resolution #3, calling for a stop to Argentinean nuclear sales until a democratically elected government signed the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty, civil and trade union rights were restored, all political prisoners were released and all disappeared were accounted for.⁴² This strong endorsement would open the door for a wider outpouring of support for the Argentineans.⁴³

While human and civil, especially trade union, rights were the focus of the campaign, there was also the nuclear issue. Many supporters were uneasy with the idea of selling dangerous nuclear technology to a rogue military regime. Past events had proven the potential for misuse, as India had used spent fuel from CANDU reactors, given as foreign aid, in its illicit manufacture of nuclear weapons, with Pakistan

⁴⁰ Klein, 136, 133-4.

⁴¹ *Saint John Evening Times-Globe*, 3 July 1979.

⁴² New Brunswick Federation of Labour, “Emergency Resolution #3,” James W. Orr Fonds, Box 3.

⁴³ The full text is available on the Labour History in New Brunswick website.

attempting to do the same. The Canadian Coalition for Nuclear Responsibility later noted that these specific reactors were the most difficult to safeguard, requiring 24 hour attention, 365 days a year, while they also produced the most plutonium, ensuring a “steady stream of the highest weapons grade plutonium,” while Argentina possessed its own reprocessing plant, which could have no peaceful use.⁴⁴ It was later shown in 1982, by statements by Dr. Miguel Ussher, assistant to the president of Argentina, that the junta had indeed attempted to operate a secret nuclear program.⁴⁵

After the port of Saint John was judged to be the port in question, the committee contacted Larry Hanley, the then radical and rank-and-file oriented head of the Saint John and District Labour Council, who had been a key organizer of the Day of Protest and who once again called upon the reliable militant, Orr. This was a unique historical moment, coupling the newly radicalized ILA of Orr and Nice’s Hundred Brats with the ascendancy of Hanley, deemed a member of a “new generation of labour leaders” and whose election as president of the provincial Federation of Labour the next year would signal a “militant takeover” in the local labour movement.⁴⁶

The picket was slated to begin the morning of 3 July 1979, and the ship in question was the *Entre Rios II*, tied up at Port Two. Orr was one of many organizers summoning support for the work action and got down to business with his trusty and well-worn telephone. One of his first calls was to Pat Riley, whom he told to meet him at the Saint John Street Gate with a group of people for 6:30 a.m. While he was unable

⁴⁴ Canadian Coalition for Nuclear Responsibility, “Nuclear Power and Atom Bombs,” April 1982, James W. Orr Fonds, Box 3.

⁴⁵ “Senior Argentinean Official Confirms Nuclear Military Program,” [Unidentified clipping], James W. Orr Fonds, Box 3.

⁴⁶ Frank, *Solidarities*, 161.

to give any concrete details, he assured his ally that it was of the utmost importance and was for a very good reason.⁴⁷ Orr had a reputation for being “somebody you could go to and count on,” and he certainly delivered, but was himself shocked by the momentous turnout.⁴⁸ Fred Nice later reflected: “that CANDU reactor, Jesus, he was some eager in that!”⁴⁹

What was happening in Argentina cut to the core of Jimmy’s being and elicited a passionate response. He noted that the regime was “quite oppressive against labour and human rights” and was well read on the situation, harbouring no illusions about the fate of many of its victims: “disappeared into a dump or the ocean. That’s where they went to, no question.”⁵⁰ Riley noted that while the effort was nationally organized, that it was Hanley and Orr who were the major organizers from the waterfront perspective, and that while Riley was later awarded the Orden de Mayo as a representative of the union and the workers of Saint John (and after the death of both Hanley and Orr), his part had been minimal, while Orr’s role was much more prominent, but that, as always, he preferred to lead from behind.

In the end, the protest was a massive success. The NO CANDU committee had come down from Ontario and set up information pickets around the port, which gave the longshoremen a justification for refusing to go to work. Three shifts of longshoremen respected the picket line and joined in, donning the now popularized “NO HOT CARGO” buttons. Vair has enumerated an impressive list of activists and organizations

⁴⁷ Bob Carty, “Hot Cargo podcast,” <http://www.cbc.ca/thesundayedition>

⁴⁸ Riley interview.

⁴⁹ Fred Nice, interview by author, Saint John, NB, 6 July 2013, tape recording and transcript in possession of author.

⁵⁰ Orr interview, 2 March 2006.

that came to the port to show their support⁵¹ This resulted in a total shutdown of the Saint John port and put a great deal of pressure on both governments. Future nuclear sales to the Argentinean junta would be cancelled and fourteen political prisoners were released as the junta bowed to the pressure.⁵² It has since been dubbed “the single most dramatic example of Canadian trade union solidarity with workers in the Third World.”⁵³ Orr, as well as his peers, sacrificed their pay, staying off the job for three to four days, and risked discipline from their own leadership as well as the livid Maritime Employers’ Association. It was considered a “concrete showing of solidarity” because of the very large penalties that the local had risked by their politically motivated actions.⁵⁴

When reached for comment at the time, Douglas Bettle, manager of the Maritime Employers’ Association, blasted the union with the usual trite ad hominem, as recalled by Orr: “They’re always looking for an excuse to stop work. They are too fat. They’ll walk off every chance they get. This work stoppage is bad for the port. It’s those longshoremen that have been driving ships away from Saint John to Montreal. It affects the port every time there’s a work stoppage.” Those who knew Orr will tell you that when he believed wholeheartedly in a cause, as he did in 1979, he would never back down. He was the first to fire back against these allegations and that the protest was no

⁵¹ “Barry Hould, from the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway, Transport and General Workers, and a group of trade unionists from Moncton, Gil Theriault, of the Maritime Fishermen’s Union with a carload of people from Richibucto, Jean-Claude Basque and Carlos Yuste, from the South East Unemployment Committee, Key Halstead, representing Ten Days for World Development, and Ann Breault, of the Catholic Women’s league, as well as members of the United Auto Workers, Canadian Union of Postal Workers, Canadian Paperworkers Union, the Canadian Union of Public Employees the Maritime Energy Coalition, the Voice of Women, the Conservation Council of New Brunswick, Project Ploughshares, various Church groups and even a few members of the Marxist-Leninist League.” (Vair, “Cargo”)

⁵² Vair interview.

⁵³ Vair, “Cargo”

⁵⁴ Email from Enrique Tabak to Pat Riley, 12 June 2006, James W. Orr Fonds, Box 3.

more than “the work of organizers from Ontario and members of Marxist-Leninist groups,” saying “if the demonstrators were allowed to go through the gates and picket the Entre Rios II, and tie up Pier II, the port would not have been shut down, but the Harbour Board won’t let them on the property, so it’s their fault.”⁵⁵ He pointed out that it was more than the average boycott, as the wildcat had saved the lives of political prisoners, and it was “rather gratifying” to have been involved.⁵⁶

Orr soon returned to the telephone ecstatically to share the news with Pat Riley, blustering “Rile, it worked!”⁵⁷ In celebration, Orr would bring a group of protesters back to his cramped apartment, where he wined and dined them, packing in as many as possible and improvising seating in order to share his enthusiasm and show his thanks.⁵⁸ Needless to say, the NO HOT CARGO sticker enjoyed a place of prominence on Orr’s refrigerator for the rest of his days. This was certainly one of Orr’s proudest moments, for which he himself received perhaps the most coverage of his career.

His indelible contribution has been immortalized in the form of a painting presented to the workers of Saint John, based on a photograph from the day of the boycott, prominently featuring the triumphant Orr, beaming with fist raised in defiance, alongside Enrique Tabak and fellow longshoreman Ronald McLeod above a rendering of the picket and the word “SOLIDARITY.” This is now on display at the Frank and Ella Hatheway Labour Exhibit Centre in Saint John.⁵⁹ The event has also been

⁵⁵ Vair, “Cargo.”

⁵⁶ Orr interview, 2 March 2006.

⁵⁷ Carty, “Hot Cargo.”

⁵⁸ Riley interview.

⁵⁹ A photo of the presentation of the painting is available on the Labour History in New Brunswick website.

commemorated by Nancy White, in her song *No Hot Cargo*, written specifically about the work stoppage, summing up the matter quite succinctly:

And the government of Canada just shuts its eyes,
and says, “There’s business deals we’ve got to finalize.
There’s a market for reactors and we long to see it grow.

But for one long day the Saint John people said, “No!”⁶⁰

Several years later, in 1982, there would be another boycott of Argentinean ships due to the Falklands War between the Latin American nation and Margaret Thatcher’s United Kingdom. This would help to put pressure on the dictatorship and contribute eventually to the toppling of the junta, as their old friend Enrique Tabak would remark in another of his “thank you” emails to the Saint John ILA.⁶¹ However, there may have been some degree of conflict in Orr’s keen mind over the role of imperialism in the war. His files contain Marxist articles pointing to the colonial dynamic on the part of the UK, as well as the United States secret logistical and intelligence support for Thatcher’s forces. While Orr clearly did not support the murderous junta, one of the articles stated that any right thinking Marxist “must stand for Britain’s defeat,” as “the united front of imperialism was the decisive issue in the war.”⁶² It is clear that Orr was also concerned about Thatcher’s virulently right wing policies, as well as the colonial attitudes of both world powers, not seeing any clear “good guy” in the conflict and seeing the only

⁶⁰ “No Hot Cargo,” <http://www.lhtnb.ca>

⁶¹ Email from Enrique Tabak to Pat Riley, 13 June 2006, James W. Orr Fonds, Box 3.

⁶² “The Malvinas War Revisited,” *Proletarian Revolution* No. 21, Spring, 1984, James W. Orr Fonds, Box 3.

potential positive outcome as being the return of democracy to Argentina after the ouster of the military junta.

While this was certainly the most dramatic and publicized showing of solidarity of Orr's career, Jimmy managed to forge many links on an international level. His small apartment was a veritable hub for visiting workers and he often played the happy host. Nice recalls how Orr would cram ten to fifteen bodies into the flat while he meticulously prepared his legendary salt cod, subjecting his guests to the habitual three-hour cocktail hour before the feast could begin. Out of town port workers, often from the UK or Australia, were regular guests and were treated to a few toddies, especially during such momentous events as the Liverpool dockworkers' strike, or the attempts to privatize the Australian National (Shipping) Line. Orr was an indulgent and understanding host, not batting an eye when his bewildered roommate Fred opened the phone bill to find a \$1500 charge as a result of the longshoremen calling home to Brisbane or Melbourne. "Jesus Jimmy! We must have been good and drunk!" he remarked, while the Bear merely shrugged and mused "Oh well, they're away from home. We can pay it, the hell with it!"⁶³

Salt cod and toddies were not the only things on offer from the militant, however, for his fellow longshoremen, especially the Australians, would be eternally grateful for Orr's efforts to support their own struggles and boycotts. Given the international nature of the shipping trade, Orr was able to make global alliances and enduring friendships with his fellow port workers, building the collective strength of his

⁶³ Nice interview.

trade on a global level. With the coming of neoliberalism came an international effort to de-unionize the world's ports. These massive changes in the industry mirrored the total overhaul of labour relations in the world economy in general as neoliberal logic threatened to turn back the clock to a time before the gains of Orr's youth. Due to the nature of the shipping industry, workers the world over could discern the winds of change blowing their way, as any defeat on any waterfront meant the same could happen at home. Luckily, owing to their strategic position in the interconnected industry, dockers (or "wharfies," in some ports) have been counted among the most militant of trade unionists, acting as "crucibles of class struggle," and are among the most likely to succeed in international campaigns.⁶⁴

One such campaign came in 1995 with the Liverpool Dockworkers' Dispute. The neoliberal Thatcher government had dismantled the longstanding National Dock Labour Scheme in an effort to casualize the nation's ports and erode standards. Many dockers were subcontracted through a third party with reduced terms, while some were also forced to work unpaid overtime, which was met with resistance and resulted in the illegal sacking of 500 workers. This crystallized into an international campaign involving the International Transport Workers' Federation. While the campaign proved to be popular and garnered widespread sympathy, it was ultimately unsuccessful. During the dispute, Jimmy Orr was filling the presidency of ILA 1764 for a term and enthusiastically supported the grassroots campaign and served as a delegate to the International Dockworkers Council. He came out in support of the dockers at a

⁶⁴ Caroline Smith, "Internationalizing Industrial Disputes: The Case of the Maritime Union of Australia," *Employee Relations*, 32:6, April 2010: 558-9.

convention in Montreal in 1997 and Tom Dufresne of the ILWU and Canadian Marine Workers' Council later recalled the "roar of the Bear" at that event.⁶⁵ He also noted the much larger role that Pat Riley played within the IDC, while Orr's own files include relevant documents with his own negotiating notes and advice for Riley, once again offering his counsel.⁶⁶ The port of Saint John was one of the most militant on the matter and was among those who took the most concrete actions in solidarity. While many ports sent telegrams of support, held meetings and leafleted, few engaged in actual stoppages. Saint John was among the few who took concrete action, and carried out annual stoppages from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. on the International Day of Action, 8 September, until the campaign faltered in 1998.⁶⁷ While the sacked dockers were not successful in their struggle, the campaign had served as a learning experience for fellow dockers and a wakeup call, as the international campaign to "restructure" the world's ports moved elsewhere.

Australian "wharfies" had anticipated changes to their own working lives after the example of Liverpool and also of nearby New Zealand. The Australian government was attempting to privatize the Australian National (Shipping) Line and sack its entire unionized workforce. Orr made many allies through his support of their struggle, while strengthening his ties to an old seafarer friend, Jack Caldwell, formerly of the Seamen's Union of Australia. Reminiscent of the CSU strike, the Australian government and the shipping company Patrick sought to bust the Maritime Union of Australia in order to

⁶⁵ Tom Dufresne, "Retirement Letter," [2010], copy provided by Pat Riley.

⁶⁶ Orr interview, 2 March 2006; Handwritten notes on Second International Conference of the IDC documents, James W. Orr Fonds, Box 3.

⁶⁷ Correspondence from Pat Riley to John Monks, 2 September 1997; Liverpool Dockworkers' Update, January 1997, James W. Orr Fonds, Box 9.

employ cheap Korean and Filipino crews. They claimed to want to mend industrial relations deemed “arthritic” due to the intransigence of “greedy” longshoremen.⁶⁸ Jimmy, as always, kept himself apprised of the developing situation, and was helped along by his old friend Jack, who sent him newspaper clippings and updates, as well as his own handwritten, sometimes caustic or salty, appraisals.

Orr’s personal files are replete with material relating to Australia, from Australian socialist literature and newspaper clippings to personal correspondence. It is evident that he devoted a great deal of his time to keeping track of the lot of his fellow longshoremen and in all likelihood it was not far from his mind that he could soon be in the same boat. One particularly grim example of defeat were the ports of New Zealand, which had been euphemistically restructured into a “flexible and just-in-time” workforce, “showing the way forward.” Jack had a tendency to cut through the high-minded rhetoric in his handwritten notes of the news he sent Orr, seeing this instead as the waterfront people losing their “very good conditions to these right wingers.”⁶⁹ The arrival of a New Zealand advisor to deal with the ANL was therefore ominous, with Jack observing, “this is some sort of a hatchet man, coming over to teach the locals the ‘New Order.’” Ending one of his letters on a combative note, Jack promised a big fight, for “waterfront workers don’t take things lying down.”⁷⁰

The entire unionized workforce of 1,400 was sacked in April 1998 and replaced with scabs amid dramatic images of longshoremen being dragged off their forklifts by

⁶⁸ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 June 1996, James W. Orr Fonds, Box 2.

⁶⁹ Note from Jack Caldwell, James W. Orr Fonds, Box 2.

⁷⁰ “NZ Advisor Sent to Join Gov’t Consultative Group,” with caption by Jack Caldwell, 8 August 1996, [Unidentified clipping], James W. Orr Fonds, Box 2; Letter from Jack Caldwell to Jimmy Orr, 2 September 1994, James W. Orr Fonds, Box 2.

security guards with attack dogs.⁷¹ The employer's secret weapon was militant strikebreakers secretly trained in Dubai, dubbed "industrial mercenaries." They were, as a rule, former law enforcement, military and martial arts experts and were intended to be used as elite strikebreakers, actually airlifted past the picket lines to keep the ports operational. "What. A Way. To. Go. To Work...?" was all Jack could muster at this news story.⁷² It was deemed the worst crisis in the industry in the past century.⁷³ The union was seen as holding on to the last vestiges of its power.⁷⁴

In Australia itself, the remaining unions, such as those in the manufacturing, construction and coal mining industries rallied to the MUA's cause. This, however, would not be enough.⁷⁵ Luckily, the MUA had friends internationally that they could rely on for a boycott. When the story of the "industrial mercenaries" came out, there was a momentous backlash against the shipping lines and their army of scabs.⁷⁶ The International Transport Federation, on good terms with the MUA for their help in the fight against flags of convenience, threatened an international boycott of Australian ships if the federal government insisted on taking on the wharfies. It boasted a membership of 5 million workers and served as a global link to other port workers⁷⁷ Orr's personal files contain a list of blacklisted ships, as well as correspondence with the Aussies, sent through the email of Terry Wilson. Longshoremen in North America

⁷¹ *The New Statesman* (London), 6 December 1998.

⁷² "Storm in a Port," [Unidentified clipping]; *Daily Telegraph*, 10 April 1998, with notes from Jack Caldwell, James W. Orr Fonds, Box 2.

⁷³ *The Sun-Herald*, (Biloxi), 12 April 1998, James W. Orr Fonds, Box 2.

⁷⁴ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 June 2006.

⁷⁵ "Union Flags of the Past Flying Again" [Unidentified clipping], James W. Orr Fonds, Box 2.

⁷⁶ "Shipwrecked," [Unidentified clipping], 14 December 1997, James W. Orr Fonds, Box 2.

⁷⁷ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 June 1998, James W. Orr Fonds, Box 2.

refused to touch the ships, which were often carrying perishables but sat idle for nearly a month.⁷⁸

Amid this international boycott, public backlash at the “industrial mercenaries” and with the MUA threatening a national strike, the federal government and Patrick folded and agreed to negotiate with the wharfies. They returned to work on 6 May 1998, amid court cases against the federal government for illegally conspiring against the union and using their “industrial mercenaries,” with 10,000 coming to the court hearing and 100,000 rallying in support.⁷⁹ Kevin Lenon, an Australian wharfie, excitedly informed the Saint John local, telling them “it’s a wonder you didn’t hear us in Canada!” The Aussies were grateful for the international support and were glad to hear from “fellow wharfies” around the world, with whom they shared pictures and endeavoured to learn more about one another’s unions.⁸⁰ Terry Wilson of Saint John assured them that this was “the true spirit of unionism” and offered his congratulations.

Orr, never terribly up to date technologically, as evidenced by his black and white television and archaic typewriter, sent a message with his insights on the matter. He informed them that he had been following the issue intently from the start and that he knew it would be a very “bad day for Australia and the working class” after, in a reference to the Australian Prime Minister John Howard, “that rotten capitalistic bastard Howard and his hench men and women were elected.” He commended the MUA for

⁷⁸ “Blackban Cargo Back from US,” 15 June 1998 [Unidentified clipping], James W. Orr Fonds, Box 2.

⁷⁹ Email from Kevin Lenon to Terry Wilson, 5 May 1998; Email from Kevin Lenon to Terry Wilson, 7 May 1998, James W. Orr Fonds, Box 2; “A Monumental Achievement,” [Unidentified clipping], James W. Orr Fonds, Box 2.

⁸⁰ Email from Kevin Lenon to Terry Wilson, 6 May 1998; Email from Kevin Lenon to Terry Wilson, 5 May 1998, James W. Orr Fonds, Box 2.

their victory and for their discipline, “as an over reaction would have brought the full force of the state down upon you.” The government had “underestimated the feeling of the people and the resolve of the MUA and the workers of Australia and the world.” He added that it “also helped that the union had good lawyers,” and hinting at his own strategic use of bureaucracy, assured them that “you have to fight fire with fire.” Aware that this was but a single battle won, he declared “THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES.” This message also gives insight into Orr’s own self-image, as he closes with a small self-description: “Jimmy Orr, 46 year veteran of the waterfront and union activist and rank and file worker Age 62.”⁸¹

Victorious but not content, the Aussies continued to keep Saint John apprised of the situation. When the court victory mandated that the shippers pay all accrued wages in full, Lenon declared “Well, whooppe!!! That’s wages that the scum bag stole from us... this prick is so devious you just cannot trust him. .. this bloke gives me the shits!”⁸² Col Harrington, another Aussie, was “sick of hearing of massive profits for companies and massive layoffs of workers.” He was angry at “the process of rewarding CEOs for firing workers” and at the fact that they would “take as much as they can get away with without resistance.” He was, however, glad at the showing of support internationally, and saw the ITF as the only worldwide labour organization that “still has teeth.” He hoped that “maybe, just maybe, the workers of the world are ready to stand up and be counted and roll back the years of employer dominance.”⁸³

⁸¹ Email from Jimmy Orr and Terry Wilson to Kevin Lenon, 5 May 1998, James W. Orr Fonds, Box 2.

⁸² Email from Kevin Lenon to Terry Wilson, 22 May 1998, James W. Orr Fonds, Box 2.

⁸³ Email from Col Harrington to Terry Wilson, 10 May 1998, James W. Orr Fonds, Box 2.

Orr's support of the boycott and hosting of the out of town workers did not go unnoticed, and his Australian guests were nothing if not grateful. They would routinely send him gifts, such as boomerangs and spears.⁸⁴ He was also invited to Australia to be commended for his solidarity and inducted into the "Australian Order of Old Bastards," an honour he took more seriously than most. "You laugh at that group!" he would bark "but it's all over the world!" He was positively insistent that it be on his resumé for the Port Authority.⁸⁵

The Australians were not the only international friends Orr made. In the 1980s, Orr became involved in the Saint John Port and Development Commission and by 1982 would act as the labour representative for the port. Jimmy had developed a very good rapport with a group of Cubans sent to Saint John in order to continue the decades long agricultural mission of exporting potatoes to the tiny Latin American nation. In his characteristic hosting, he invited the delegation to his apartment and introduced them to the Canadian cuisine of moose meat, a feast he had planned long in advance.⁸⁶ He had also travelled to Cuba for the purposes of the mission over the years as the labour representative for the port, and was quick to jump to action when the trade was threatened in the run-up to the 1990s.⁸⁷ In addition to the bond of friendship he had formed with his Cuban patrons, the partnership was very good for the port of Saint John, potatoes being a labour intensive cargo and keeping a great number of longshoremen in work, employing six 18-man gangs. When it was to be diverted by the McCains "and

⁸⁴ Nice interview.

⁸⁵ Riley interview.

⁸⁶ *Saint John Evening Times-Globe*, 7 December 1987.

⁸⁷ Photos of Orr in Cuba; Mr. James William Orr program folder, James W. Orr Fonds, Box 2.

the powers that be” to Bayside, Jimmy was the first to suggest a mission to Ottawa in order to keep the trade for at least a few more years. He felt it reasonable to get the union involved, given the left-leaning nature of the Cuban government, and he would act, along with Pat Riley, as their charismatic representative, using both his genuine friendships and likemindedness to gain some consideration from Cuba.

Orr was no stranger to the far left and had garnered some useful contacts through the years. He was acquainted with an editor of the Communist Party of Canada’s periodicals, for which he had been interviewed over the years for his insights on the trade union movement, and contacted him in order to set up a meeting at the Cuban embassy. Orr and Riley arrived by train and were immediately swamped by the equally hospitable Cubans who then wined and dined them, talking very little business. These were senior members of the embassy staff who were more than happy to accommodate Orr’s mutually beneficial request. It did not hurt that Orr had the contacts and referred them to his Cuban counterparts, who happily vouched for him. The characteristic Jimmy kerfuffle did not, however, occur until the duo returned home.

The team filed their report with the Port and Development Commission and put in to have their expenses for the trip covered. Elsie Wayne, mayor and former PDC member, did not want to pay for their mission. “It was a successful mission! We got some business back!” blustered Orr, confounded. “As far as I’m concerned, there were only two union people on the trip, let the union pay for it!” was her response. This was when the twinkle returned to Jimmy’s eye and he had yet another chance to “get them going.” In his characteristically difficult fashion, Orr retorted: “I’ve got news for you, Elsie, that meeting wasn’t organized by the union, it was organized by the Communist

Party of Canada!” Needless to say, Wayne was bewildered. In the end, Hugh MacLellan, a judge, ruled that the expenses would indeed be covered, for the mission was a success, regardless of who organized it. Riley laughed as he recalled Orr’s antics, remarking “he got his way when all was said and done, and had a little fun doing it.”⁸⁸

While Orr had forged genuine friendships with his Cuban comrades and harboured sympathies for the left-leaning Cuban communist government, once again his readings reveal tension in his thoughts. The Bear was a committed leftist and self-professed Communist, he was not a starry eyed follower. His friends doubted the veracity of his claim to be a dyed in the wool commie, Riley intoning that he *may* have been, but both he and Nice thought it was mostly to get people’s goat.⁸⁹ It is clear, however, that he did subscribe to Communist Party periodicals and may have held a study group, while also attending several Party conventions, having many contacts with its members and supporting the Party financially during its prolonged legal battle in 1993.⁹⁰ Be that as it may, there is no evidence that he was a Party member, and it is clear from his 1978 provincial election campaign that he was at one time a member of the New Democratic Party, while he himself alluded to his support for both the NDP and the old CCF.⁹¹ Riley noted that Orr had great democratic ideals and believed that everyone was entitled to their own political views.⁹² Orr’s perhaps muddled political views can be partially explained by the milieu of his youth. Ian McKay’s “horizontal analysis” of

⁸⁸ Riley interview.

⁸⁹ Nice interview; Riley interview.

⁹⁰ ‘Thank You’ Letter from the Communist Party of Canada to Jimmy Orr, 12 October 1993; Letter from CPC Central Committee addressed to Comrade James and Club Members, 19 April 2000; Documents of the 31st Convention of the CPC, 19-22 May 1995; *The Partisan* 1:2 April 2000; “75th anniversary of CPC 1921-1996”; *Saint John Times-Globe*, 4 October 1993, James W. Orr Fonds, Box 3.

⁹¹ “Vote James Orr” (pamphlet 1978), James W. Orr Fonds, Box 3; Orr interview, 2 March 2006.

⁹² Riley interview.

“reconnaissance” paints a picture of Canadian left culture that mirrors Orr’s own views.⁹³ While his files seem to indicate a radicalization in his later years, George Vair raises the very valid point that in that time the NDP had changed much and its early socialist rhetoric of nationalization would be unspeakable. Orr’s own radical thinking had certainly not undergone such accommodations and he simply sought out a forum that still spoke to his controversial views.⁹⁴

His personal files contain news clippings relating to inequality and discrimination in Cuba, as well as the quasi-colonial relationship it has with First World tourists. They also contain articles relating to the export of Cuban lobster, which was seen as “bourgeois” and “decadent” by the Cuban government, who instead used the money to “buy milk for children.”⁹⁵ Orr tracked the exports to Bayside and singled out the ships involved, as he did for numerous boycotts, keeping himself apprised of the situation but not taking any concrete action.⁹⁶ Evidently his thinking on this was nuanced and conflicted and he would not overlook the shortcomings of his allies.

While Orr was unabashedly critical, he was also open to new ways of thinking and willing to learn from his peers. In the year 2000, the Saint John ILA locals all merged into ILA 273 and Orr would retire the following year. The weathered rebel was quickly appointed a director of the Port Authority, continuing to exert his stewardship over the port. In 2005, the elder statesman was invited on a mission to Europe by the

⁹³ McKay, 175, 113.

⁹⁴ Vair interview.

⁹⁵ “Lobster, Dollars and Cuban Discrimination,” (Reuters, 21 January 1989), James W. Orr Fonds, Box 2.

⁹⁶ *The St. Croix Courier*, 1 December 1992; Handwritten notes by Jimmy Orr, James W. Orr Fonds, Box 2.

employers, at the behest of the Irving companies, who sought to “soften up” the union.⁹⁷ However, the European experience backfired on the sponsors, as the delegation, which included Orr, Nice, Terry Breen and others, including “Irving’s man” John King, would not be taken in by the horror stories of the European waterfronts intended to cow them into a more malleable position. Nice laughed that they “didn’t believe in their BS they had to give!” Instead of being greeted by privation and austerity, the delegates, who arrived first in Sweden, encountered longshoremen travelling between jobs on bicycles, on-site masseuses, a varied menu in a job-site restaurant, laundry, gymnasiums, gathering areas and platters of free fruit. “Geez, we’ll take that!” the party remarked. Orr was particularly impressed by the fact that the workers were “treated as human beings” and thought the working conditions were just wonderful. This was not all: the typical insecurity of waterfront work was gone, for workers would know their entire schedule for the year and were guaranteed jobs for life, even in the case of disability. Another attraction was that the company owned chalets which were used as time shares, with each longshoreman getting a free two week vacation in the summer. In Germany, the Saint John group was regaled with talk of considerable pensions and were interested in matters of pay and of the manner of getting work, while in Holland they were astounded by the fact that they had specific longshoreman schools that would train workers in all types of technology, from container machines to forklifts to trains. They offered a four year apprenticeship with periods of six months in the classroom and six months on the job site, resulting in a license of Class A longshoreman. They would also travel to France and Belgium, which did not live up to the cautionary tales of the employers.

⁹⁷ Nice interview; Riley interview.

The trip was not without its bumps, which began early for Orr, whose luggage was lost. The image of The Bear in a borrowed shirt which fit around him, but which he could not manage to button, was a farcical one. He also had a crash course in European career practice which had caused him some trepidation. Enjoying the atmosphere of European restaurants, Orr had taken to drinking cognac. When he got it in the wrong type of glass, he asked for the correction to be made. Orr and Nice would later encounter the waiter planting flowers outside and Nice teased him and told him that he had caused the poor man to be demoted, which caused Jimmy no small amount of concern and remorse. However, after a brief conversation with the young lad, it was revealed that in Europe, you are expected to do all aspects of the job and that he was in fact a “waiter plus,” having to also do groundskeeping and upkeep for the restaurant. Relieved and impressed, Orr could rest easy knowing he had not caused as much trouble as he feared.

Orr had also managed to break down John King, an American Irving representative and reputed “warmonger.” King had never liked Orr and thought that he had “nothing upstairs” because the two could never see eye to eye. After a few drinks and some lively debate, King would “love Jimmy Orr then.” Orr’s charm and quick wit would eventually make the Irving rep grow to appreciate him, for he would prove to be fascinating, despite the radical gulf in their beliefs. This was often the case with Orr, as even his rivals could not help but respect, or fear, him once they came to know him.

The positive aspects were not what the Irvings had wanted the longshoremen to see, but they had keen eyes and sharp minds, getting the information that they themselves sought and were impressed by. The Saint John ILA has since been very open to new ideas and often looks to Europe, especially Scandinavia, for inspiration in

matters of social justice and workplace standards. What the bosses had intended them to see were the concurrent technological innovations, which were less warmly received. One aspect in particular was not to Orr's liking: computerized checking. As the pencil man, he would have little room in this system, necessarily having to learn to drive a computerized forklift to do his job, which owing to his back troubles he could not rightly do. This evoked the image of Orr comically roving about the K Mart parking lot for half an hour seeking a spot he could drive out of, as he could not turn his neck sufficiently so as to look behind him due to his lifelong back problems.⁹⁸ The impact of technology on the Saint John waterfront had already been immense but inexorable. It would prove impossible to circumvent entirely and would require a great deal of adaptation and accommodation. Containerization had had the largest impact and radically shrunk labour needs, but the local had successfully defended against any major alterations of their collective agreement.⁹⁹

By the twilight of Orr's career, the ILA in Saint John had been fundamentally altered, breaking away from the inward looking and materialistic trends of the ILA proper and instead supporting the causes of social justice and international solidarity. Orr and company had brought in a new era for the local and helped to nurture a new generation of union activists with a much broader mindset and priorities who were also successful in many of their struggles. When the local's bargaining with the Irvings met a rough patch in 2002, they received moral and concrete support from roughly 30 organizations from places as far away as Namibia, Japan and Indonesia, including the

⁹⁸ Nice interview.

⁹⁹ Riley interview.

grateful Liverpool dockers. The small union also entered a unique partnership with CUPE in order to bolster their negotiating power in what was dubbed “a wave of the future” for unionism.¹⁰⁰ Tellingly, in a missive from the radical ILWU, ILA 273’s “proud, militant history and commitment to solidarity” is noted as well as the fact that it made “any stand or action we partake in on your behalf an honour.”¹⁰¹

In 2003, ILA 273, harkening back to 1979, engaged in another hot cargo action, this time boycotting all war supplies destined for the Iraq war. The local made this brave stand before the Canadian government had decided whether or not to become involved, and they would not load any related cargo unless the United Nations gave its approval of the invasion. Pat Riley, a student of Orr’s, told the media at the time that “you can’t separate a people from their conscience.”¹⁰² In 2010, Pat Riley accepted the Orden de Mayo on behalf of ILA 273 and the workers of Saint John, the highest honour that could be bestowed upon a foreigner by the Argentinean government. This was recognition of the local’s daring act of solidarity by committed benefactors who were firmly convinced that had it not been for the Saint John longshoremen, they would have perished in the torture labs of the junta.¹⁰³ The local, once concerned with dollars and cents, now had a cosmopolitan and politically minded outlook and was not afraid to make principled stands, thanks in part to the legacy of Jimmy Orr and those who had come of age around him. They were now a “local with guts.”¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ *Saint John Telegraph-Journal*, 5 November 2002.

¹⁰¹ Correspondence from Richard Mead to Pat Riley, 19 November 2002, James W. Orr Fonds, Box 11.

¹⁰² *Maritime Independent Media Centre*, 20 March 2003, James W. Orr Fonds, Box 3.

¹⁰³ Vair interview.

¹⁰⁴ Email from Enrique Tabak to Pat Riley, 13 June 2006, James W. Orr Fonds, Box 3.

ILA 273's many victories did not spell an end to the troubles on the waterfront or in Saint John. By the time of Orr's retirement, the city landscape had altered drastically and much of its industrial infrastructure had declined. There was great impetus to go west in search of work, resulting in both family and community disruption as well as a weakening of the trade union movement. The ILA had proven to hold a tenuous but privileged position due to the objective structures of the port, which could not reasonably be moved like other infrastructure, but its own position would still be threatened. Legal battles over the matter of the port land would dog the local and it would be pilloried by the corporate media and the issue would be cast as "those greedy longshoremen" stealing the land, when in fact it was federally mandated and could not be sold, despite its immense value.¹⁰⁵ Jimmy was thrown into rages over the shutdown of the dry dock, and the \$50,000,000 parachute given to Irving for its termination, ranting and raving about corporate welfare and the fact that the workers had not received their pensions or received the correct amount. While The Bear could not help but respect the Irvings, he was "not a fan of them" and thought they had undue influence on the government and press. Nice himself intoned that they had "broke a lot of backs and broke a lot of hearts, broke a lot of promises, and got away with it."

It is evident that Jimmy Orr was a man with wider aspirations. Not content to serve only the interests of his own union from within its offices, the Bear and his allies took to the streets in 1976 to defend the rights of all working Canadians, and he and the ILA would go on to use their collective power not only on their own waterfront, but to support the struggles of working people as far away as Australia. For their efforts, they

¹⁰⁵ Riley interview.

would receive a mutual outpouring of support from other organizations who recognized the militant reputation that Orr and others had managed to imprint upon their union.

Having been impacted by the legacy of 1949, Orr had helped to reawaken that spirit of solidarity in the Saint John ILA and forged local and international alliances in order to combat the neoliberal assault on working people. Their rebellious reputation and “guts” have resonated with their counterparts and will not be forgotten.

Conclusion

From speaking to those who knew him, it is clear that Jimmy Orr was no anonymous militant, but instead a thoroughly human and deeply compassionate individual with powerful ideals and an even more powerful force of character. Though he enjoyed little limelight in the formal press, with a few exceptions, Jimmy Orr clearly left an impression upon those he lived and struggled with. To ask a West Sider, or labour person, about Orr is to evoke fond memories of a boisterous troublemaker with a bit of the devil in him, a fervent unionist and a modest man with a simple love of baseball, good food and sharing. Not only did he have an impact on the labour and social movements he supported, but he also managed to impart his strict moral ideals to many of those around him, including a new generation of activists who remember him fondly as a “champion.”¹

A young Orr, through a combination of circumstance and events beyond his control would certainly be pointed in the direction of the trade union movement, but while circumstance would help bring Orr to the waterfront and slide him neatly into the union, Orr’s own character would be the reason for his obsessive attendance at union meetings and his prolific reading and critiquing of union documents. He had no interest in reading what he was told to read, but was hell-bent upon devouring anything he was told not to and was never satisfied with institutions as they were, but rather obsessed

¹ Pat Riley, “Eulogy,” May 2010, copy provided by David Frank, 4.

over how they should be. His own path of inquiry was a vital contributor to his later radicalism. While he had to be chased about in order to get him to go to school, “The Bear” would prove himself an immovable object when it came to the place he would carve out for himself in the trade union movement.

While it is clear that Orr’s involvement with the fledgling Saint John Non-Union Longshoremen’s Protective Association was hardly his first foray into militancy, it was the defining moment of his career that set him against the bureaucracy of his own local and established him as a principled advocate for the rank-and-file, earning him a whole host of detractors among his peers, but also a cavalcade of new allies, with whom he could share his wisdom and values. Orr would be ridiculed and disciplined by his own local, barred from any real advancement and stuck with volunteer positions and kept from the top rung of union work, but it was in this niche that Jimmy fit perfectly, and he would prove impossible to dislodge. As observed by his friend Fred Nice, Orr should have had several promotions in the union, such as the Area Representative position, but in reality would never have a chance because he was “too against the system.”² If Orr believed sincerely in a cause, he would pursue it with dogged determination, even if he had to do so alone. That he did, and against great odds, Jimmy managed to help in remaking the local ILA into a force more in line with his ideals, a step toward the fairer world that continued to exist in Orr’s mind.

² Fred Nice, interview by author, Saint John, NB, 6 July 2013, tape recording and transcript in possession of author.

He shared this vision with any and all who were willing to listen, making local and international alliances for a shared purpose of defending the rights of working people and trying to support, either morally or concretely, all those who came to him asking for help. Along the way, Jimmy made real friendships with his co-workers, visiting peers from places such as England and Australia, a few “Old Bastards” as well as his counterparts in Cuba and other activists from a multitude of viewpoints and walks of life. To Jimmy, being an activist was a duty and a great responsibility, one he took very seriously and was grateful to bear. As an “elder statesman,” Orr continued to be a champion of the underdog and to look out for the interests of the rank-and-file, his community and those in need. He held several volunteer positions and kept watch over the port as a Director of the Port Authority, while quietly donating to a whole host of charities such as the Sierra Club and sitting on the Board of Directors of the Romero House Soup Kitchen and serving as a trustee of the Hatheway Trust. It seems his work was never done.³

As Jimmy would say, the struggle continues. Unfortunately, that struggle will have to continue without Brother Orr, who, after an illustrious and underreported career, passed away in 2009 from his struggle with bone cancer. He died in his Prince Street apartment in West Saint John, which he had stubbornly refused to leave for most of his life. Fred watched his deterioration, saying that his friend had died a hard death.⁴ Orr’s entire life had been a struggle, and The Bear was a seasoned fighter. George Vair, who visited him in the hospital, remembers that even then Jimmy retained his sense of

³ James W. Orr Obituary, <http://www.inmemoriam.ca>

⁴ Nice interview.

humour, telling him that his coming test results would tell him either that he could go home or that he could “stop buying those green bananas.”⁵

At the time of his retirement, Orr was remembered by many the world over, receiving letters of congratulations from the IDC, the Liverpool dockers, the CLC, the CMWC and others, including a heartfelt missive from his daughter, upon his retirement.⁶ His retirement banner itself boasted scores of signatures and well-wishers.⁷ Later, when Nice and Riley, among others, served as his pallbearers, Orr’s funeral drew many friends and allies from well beyond the union movement. Nice would remember his former roommate and partner in crime as a “loyal friend” and “a character.”⁸ Pat Riley delivered a thoughtful eulogy that commemorated Orr as both a man and a unionist. It covered his mischievous character and twinkling eyes, his booming voice and rolling shoulders, his keen mind and his giving nature. He was remembered as a man with strong family values and a fervent trade unionism. He quoted one of Orr’s heroes, Joe Hill, in saying “Don’t waste time in mourning, organize!”⁹ When asked, Riley said that he wanted Jimmy to be remembered first and foremost as a “principled trade unionist,” for this was the identity that Orr had created for himself and that he upheld his entire working life.¹⁰

⁵ George Vair, interview by author, Saint John, NB, 10 April 2014, tape recording and transcript in possession of author.

⁶ Various retirement letters for Jimmy Orr [2001], copies provided by Pat Riley.

⁷ Jimmy Orr Retirement Banner, James W. Orr Fonds, MC3465, Box 16, PANB.

⁸ Nice interview.

⁹ Pat Riley, interview by author, Saint John, NB, 23 May 2013, tape recording and transcript in possession of author; Pat Riley, “Eulogy,” [May 2010], copy provided by David Frank, 4

¹⁰ Riley interview.

Orr was a gifted man who would always share those gifts with others, using his talents and abilities to uplift those around him while modestly staying in the background, wanting simply to be “one of the soldiers.” His friends and allies remember him as “a giant among men” and “a great champion” of working people everywhere.¹¹ He lived a modest but momentous life, leaving an indelible imprint on those around him, friend and foe alike, if not in the history books and accounts of the “great men” of history. Yet, if you talk to people from Saint John, or elsewhere for that matter, he is widely and fondly remembered. His story is one of a dedicated rank-and-file unionist and compassionate human being that merits our attention, even if he never sought it for himself. His friends have vowed to continue his struggle, which would have been greatly aided by his boisterous and devilish character, but he has left his imprint on them and the trade union movement in general. As George Vair recalls, Jimmy would bring the debate down to what it was really about: “either you have principles, or you don’t.”¹²

Solidarity forever, Brother Jimmy!

¹¹ Riley, “Eulogy”, 1, 4; Riley interview.

¹² Vair interview.

Appendix

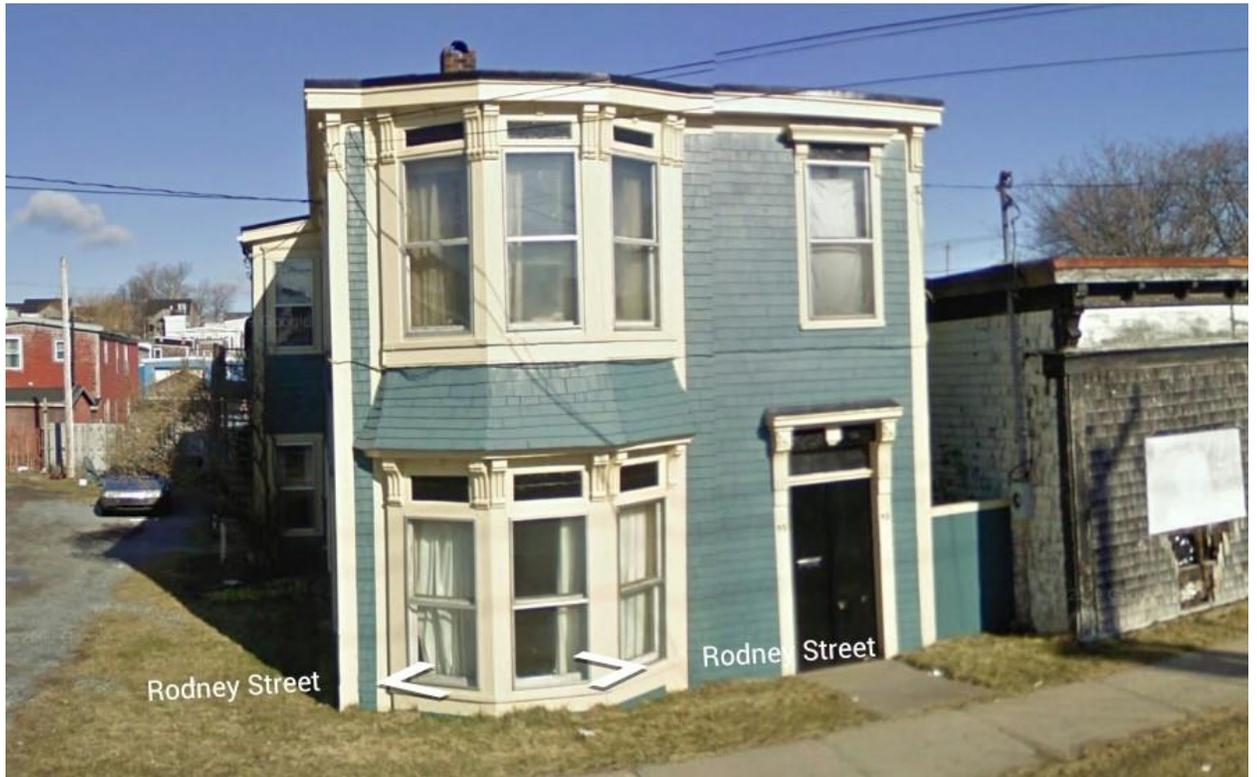


Figure 2: The Orr family household in 2009, shortly before its demolition (Courtesy of Google Maps)



Figure 3: Orr and Nice's Prince Street apartment building where Jimmy lived for the remainder of his life (Photo by author)

- (1) WE BE GIVEN PRIORITY TO ALL WORK AVAILABLE UNDER I.L.A. JURISDICTION AFTER ALL I.L.A. MEMBERS ARE EMPLOYED.
- (2) WE BE GIVEN ASSURANCE THAT ONCE A MAN IS EMPLOYED HE WILL BE GUARANTEED WORK FOR THAT PARTICULAR PERIOD.
- (3) WE STATE THAT IT IS NOT OUR INTENTION TO COMPETE OR CONFLICT IN ANY WAY WITH THE I.L.A. OR ITS MEMBERS, BUT RATHER TO WORK WITH THEM AND EVENTUALLY TO JOIN THEM, IN A MANNER THAT WILL NOT JEOPARDIZE THE PREFERENCE TO WORK OF CURRENT I.L.A. MEMBERS.
- (4) WE BE GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO MEET WITH THE I.L.A. WITH REGARDS TO DISCUSSING MEMBERSHIP IN EXISTING I.L.A. LOCALS.
- (5) WE BE GIVEN THE RIGHT TO RECEIVE WELFARE BENEFITS FOR WHICH WE ARE PRESENTLY PAYING.

IT IS OUR RELIEF THAT THE AIMS AND OBJECTS OUTLINED ABOVE ARE ENTIRELY JUSTIFIABLE AND DESERVE DUE CONSIDERATION FROM ALL PARTIES INVOLVED.

WE FURTHER STATE THAT THIS ASSOCIATION HAS BEEN FORMED IN A TRUE AND DEMOCRATIC MANNER AND IS WITHOUT PREJUDICE AND INTENDS NO MALICE TOWARD ANY GROUP, ORGANIZATION OR INDIVIDUAL.

SIGNED THIS 9TH DAY OF JANUARY 1978.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE,

.....*James W. Orr*.....CHAIRMAN

.....*James E. Stevens*.....SECRETARY-TREASURER

.....*James W. Gordon*.....MEMBER

.....*James W. Gordon*.....MEMBER

.....*James W. Gordon*.....MEMBER

Figure 4: The NULPA manifesto (James W. Orr fonds)

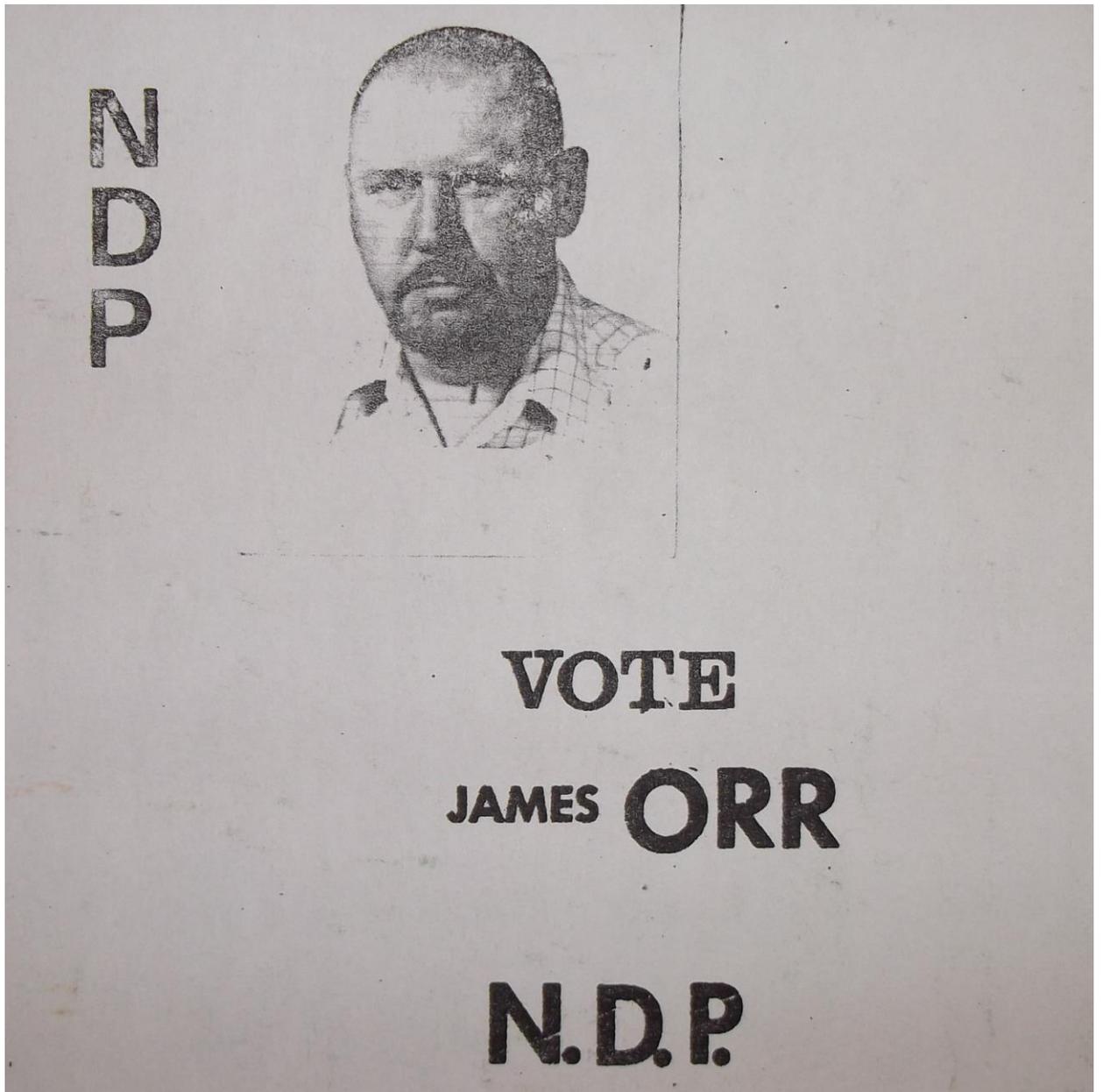


Figure 5: James Orr 1978 election flyer (James W. Orr fonds)



Figure 6: Painting by Richard Peachey based upon the photo of Orr, Tabak and McLeod (Figure 1) and others taken that day, on display at the Hatheway Centre (Photo by author)

IN SAINT JOHN



President Gleason signs the Mayor of Saint John's official guest book. Looking on from left are Jim Orr, Secretary-Treasurer of the Waterfront Council of Saint John and delegate, Local 1764; Ralph F. Daley, Atlantic Coast Vice President, ILA; The Honorable A. Robert W. Lockhart, Mayor of Saint John, New Brunswick, Canada; and Abel (Sonny) LeBlanc, President, ILA Local 273. President Gleason was in the Canadian port city to deliver the keynote address at Saint John Port Days ceremonies.

Figure 7: Jimmy Orr (left) alongside ILA President Teddy Gleason (sitting), a year before Orr's run-in with the international in Miami in 1983. ILA newsletter from December 1982 (James W. Orr fonds)



Figure 8: Jimmy Orr with his counterparts in Cuba during a 1990 agricultural mission representing the Port of Saint John (James W. Orr Fonds)



Figure 9: Jimmy Orr as the Labour Representative for the Saint John Port Development Commission (James W. Orr Fonds)

Resumé

JAMES W. ORR

355 Prince Street, Apt. # 22

Saint John, N.B. E2M 1P8

Phone (506) 672-8528

BORN: December 16, 1936
Saint John, New Brunswick

EDUCATION: New Albert Elementary School
Saint John High School

**ADULT
EDUCATION:** Atlantic Region Labour Education Centre
Saint Francis Xavier University
Antigonish, N.S.
Level 1 - 1972 - Certificate
Level 2 - 1976 - Certificate

**MILITARY
SERVICE:** Royal Canadian Navy
February, 1954 to August, 1955
Honourable Discharge (Medical Grounds)

**EMPLOYMENT
HISTORY:** 1952 - 1965 Canadian Pacific Railway
Saint John, N.B.
Winterport Freight Operations
Resigned as Night Shift Supervisor

1965 - 2001 Port Stevedore Companies & Terminal Operators
Saint John, N.B.
Steamship Checker/Longshoreman
Retired

**TRADE UNION
AFFILIATIONS:** 1952 - 1965 Brotherhood of Railway, Airline, Steamship, Clerks,

		Checkers, Express, Freight and Station Employees Sand Point Lodge, Saint John, N.B.
	1965 - 2000	International Longshoremen's Association Local 1764 Saint John, N.B.
	1970 - 1998	Saint John District Labour Council
	1972 - 1994	Saint John District Waterfront Council
	2000 - 2001	International Longshoremen's Association Local 273 Saint John, N.B.
TRADE UNION POSITIONS:	Served as:	President 1st Vice-President Secretary-Treasurer Executive Board Member Various Union Committees
TRUST POSITIONS:	1988 - 1990	International Longshoremen's Association/Maritime Employers Association Pension and Welfare Plan Saint John/Halifax Board of Trustees
	1994 - 2000	The Hatheway Trust Saint John, N.B. Board of Trustees
BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS:	1977 - 1979	Saint John Community Appeals Review Board
	1983 - 1993	Saint John Port Development Commission

	1993 - Present	Romero House Inc. Saint John, N.B. Board of Directors
FRATERNAL AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONS:		Royal Canadian Legion (50 year member) The Council of Canadians The Canadian Arthritis Society Canadian Association of Retired Persons Amnesty International Australasian Order of Old Bastards Badge #241220
HOBBIES:		Reading , Gardening , Hunting , Traditional Maritime Cooking

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Figure 10: Jimmy Orr's resume for the Saint John Port Authority. Note his insistence upon including his membership in the Australian Order of Old Bastards (Copy provided by Pat Riley)



Figure 11: Jimmy Orr's gravesite in Fernhill Cemetery in Saint John, New Brunswick. Note the small painted bear left on the grave (Photo by author)

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Curriculum Vitae

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 - Master of Arts, History