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Striking in a Post-COVID World: Post-Pandemic Strike Waves in Liberal Market Economies

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Political Science

by

Ian Davis Kinzel

June 2026

Dissertation Committee:
Dr. Marissa Brookes, Chairperson
Dr. Miguel Carreras
Dr. John Cioffi

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Ian Davis Kinzel
2026

The Dissertation of Ian Davis Kinzel is approved:

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Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

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As willing as I am to accept full accountability for this dissertation, it was only ever possible because of the people who supported me and believed in me.

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...while surreptitiously slipping me a twenty.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Striking in a Post-COVID World: Post-Pandemic Strike Waves in Liberal Market Economies

by

Ian Davis Kinzel

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Political Science
University of California, Riverside, June 2026
Dr. Marissa Brookes, Chairperson

This dissertation examines why the COVID-19 pandemic produced post-pandemic strike waves in some liberal market economies but not others. The U.S., U.K., and Canada experienced escalating strike activity; Australia, Ireland, and New Zealand did not. In Canada, a wave concentrated in Quebec but not in Ontario or British Columbia.

The dissertation proposes an activation sequencing framework, in which waves arose where premature rollback of pandemic-era income supports met coordination networks already operationally exercised for cross-sector mobilization. Neither condition alone was sufficient. The within-Canada comparison points to network activation as a key variable. Rollback appears necessary but insufficient; the mobilization capacity hypothesis is not supported, as the United States produced a wave from the most adverse structural position; activation sequencing alone is consistent with all cases examined.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND THEORY

I. The Puzzle

In 2023, workers in the United States went on strike in numbers not seen in decades: that year, 16.7 million work days were lost due to strike activity, the highest since 2000, and a 422% increase from 3.2 million work days lost in 2019. The scale of this strike wave stands in contrast with a continued long-term decline in union density, as only 10% of U.S. workers are union members.

The United States may stand out for the embattled status of its organized labor movement, but it is not alone in its post-pandemic strike wave experience. Indeed, in the years following the COVID-19 pandemic, the United Kingdom and Canada also experienced their largest strike waves in a generation, with workers in healthcare, education, transport, and manufacturing walking out in numbers not seen since the 1980s. The proximate grievances were broadly consistent: real wage erosion driven by post-pandemic inflation, inadequate staffing in essential services, and the expiration of pandemic-era income supports that had temporarily cushioned household finances.

These are not the only countries to experience strikes, or even increased strike activity, following the pandemic. These cases are analytically significant for two major reasons:

First, these countries stand out for the degree of escalation. At some point between 2021 and 2024, the U.S., U.K., and Canada each recorded exponential increases in work stoppages, workers involved, or working days lost; these metrics not only

exceeded 2010-2019 decade-long averages, but also formed a sharp discontinuity against prevailing 2018-2019 trends.

Second, these countries are noted in the "Varieties of Capitalism" (VoC) and comparative capitalism literature as liberal market economies (LME's), in which economic activity is directed primarily through decentralized, competitive market mechanisms rather than state intervention or collaborative institutions. This institutional framework - particularly in the United States - is theorized to inhibit mass collective worker action and large-scale strike activity.

A strike wave, as used here, refers to a period of exponential growth across multiple dimensions of strike activity, forming a persistent discontinuity against prior baseline trends rather than a single spike in one metric. By this standard, other LME's such as Australia, Ireland, and New Zealand did not experience post-pandemic strike waves: Australia's strike activity levels remained steady, Ireland's strike activity dropped considerably following the pandemic, and New Zealand continued strike activity trends already in place from 2018-2019. All three countries had strikes during this period; none experienced the kind of sustained, multidimensional escalation that characterized the US, UK, and Canada.

To understand the presence of a strike wave in some countries, and the absence of a wave in other countries, this dissertation compares six Liberal Market Economies: the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, Ireland, and New Zealand. These six cases are not chosen because they are identical; they are chosen because they are comparable. Each is an established Liberal Market Economy with a shared institutional

heritage: common law traditions, decentralized industrial relations, shareholder-oriented corporate governance - and, during the COVID-19 pandemic, each country faced a shared exogenous shock in the same historical window.

The LME framework does not erase the differences between the United States and New Zealand; after all, the mere fact of divergent post-pandemic outcomes, by itself, foreshadows considerable institutional differences between these cases. And yet, the shared LME framework provides a controlled baseline by which a comparison becomes analytically meaningful: if these cases were institutionally incomparable, divergent outcomes would be unsurprising. Because they are institutionally comparable, divergent outcomes are more easily explained by focusing on areas of institutional contrast.

Standard predictors do not resolve the puzzle. Union density does not predict wave outcomes: Ireland's union density of approximately 22% is more than double the US rate of 10%, yet Ireland experienced a post-pandemic strike downturn while the US experienced a wave. Economic conditions do not resolve it either: Australia and New Zealand experienced inflation rates and labor market tightness comparable to the UK and Canada, yet produced no waves. Party government and welfare regime do not predict it: Canada and Australia are both resource-influenced LMEs with comparably generous welfare states and center-left governments for portions of this period, yet their strike outcomes diverged sharply.

Just as the cross-national comparisons are instructive, so too is a within-country comparison that runs inside the Canadian case. At the national level, Canada's metrics sit comfortably alongside those of the U.K. and the U.S. However, the provincial level

reveals a very different story: Canada's strike wave is unique for its near-total concentration in the province of Quebec, which experienced a dramatic escalation of strike activity in 2022 and 2023. Ontario and British Columbia, Canada's two other largest provinces, did not experience equivalent escalation despite facing the same federal economic conditions, the same inflation environment, and the same rollback of pandemic-era federal supports.

Put simply, the central question of this dissertation is as follows: why did a shared exogenous shock produce post-pandemic strike waves in some comparable Liberal Market Economies, but not others? And why, within Canada, did Quebec experience a strike wave while Ontario and British Columbia did not? To answer this question, this project engages with both cross-national and within-country comparisons: e.g. what sets the U.S. apart from Australia (cross-national), and what sets Quebec apart from Ontario (within-country).

This dissertation argues that post-pandemic strike waves arose from an intersection of two separate conditions: an economically premature rollback of pandemic-era protections, and labor movements whose coordination networks were already activated prior to the pandemic.

Neither condition alone was sufficient. The rollback of pandemic supports raised the material stakes for workers across most cases, but translating that pressure into a sustained, cross-sector wave required coordination infrastructure that was not merely present but actively exercised. This required networks through which unions had recent practice in synchronizing action, sharing resources, and escalating collectively.

The argument is not that non-wave cases lacked coordination capacity - this research project did not uncover that the U.S. labor movement possesses greater coordination capacity than labor unions throughout most of Canada! Rather, the argument is that labor movements in non-wave cases entered the post-pandemic period with coordination networks that were latent rather than activated generally because the people and resources involved in labor movement coordination were strategically focused elsewhere immediately prior to the pandemic.

The United States and United Kingdom, had undergone a process of network activation during the 2010s, in the wake of the Global Financial Crisis, through the emergence of new organizing models in the Fight for $15 campaign, the Red for Ed teacher strikes, and the growth of extra-institutional labor networks capable of cross-sector coordination. Meanwhile, Quebec had never undergone deactivation in the first place: its Common Front bargaining culture, in which public sector unions coordinate action across sectors in successive bargaining rounds, maintained continuously active coordination networks across the entire period. Ontario and British Columbia had the institutional infrastructure for coordination, but it took the pandemic itself to trigger their networks to coordinate.

The sequencing is the mechanism. What determined wave outcomes was not how much coordination capacity existed, but whether that capacity was activated when the shock landed. This is a timing claim, not a threshold claim. This dissertation argues that post-pandemic strike waves arose where two conditions conjoined: an economically premature rollback of pandemic-era protections, which raised the material stakes for

workers before labor markets had stabilized, and labor movement coordination networks that were already operationally activated before the pandemic arrived. Neither condition alone was sufficient. Premature rollback occurred in Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States – but it also occurred identically across Quebec, Ontario, and British Columbia, since federal policy does not vary by province. If rollback alone were sufficient to produce a wave, Ontario and British Columbia should have produced one alongside Quebec. They did not. The within-Canada comparison is the sharpest single test: it holds federal economic conditions constant and isolates variation in coordination network activation status as the only available explanation for divergent outcomes. What determined whether a shared grievance became a sustained, cross-sector wave was not how much coordination capacity a labor movement possessed, but whether that capacity was activated (i.e. operationally exercised for cross-sector mobilization) at the moment the shock arrived.

II. The Literature

Three bodies of scholarship bear directly on the puzzle established in the previous section: the literature on strike waves and labor mobilization, the comparative political economy tradition associated with Varieties of Capitalism and its successors, and social movement theory's treatment of organizational networks and the Power Resources Approach. Each tradition illuminates a different dimension of the conditions under which collective action emerges, and together they provide the analytical foundations for the empirical puzzle examined in subsequent sections.

Strike Waves and Labor Mobilization

The foundational accounts of strike waves identify the structural and organizational conditions under which synchronized collective action becomes possible. Shorter and Tilly (1974), whose study of France from 1830 to 1968 established that waves are not random accumulations but episodes of synchronized collective action shaped by organizational density and macroeconomic context, situate wave occurrence at the intersection of organizational infrastructure and economic stress. Kelly (1998) extended this framework by applying social movement mobilization theory to industrial relations, arguing that collective action depends on perceptions of injustice, collective identity formation, attribution of blame to an identifiable party, and activist leadership capable of channeling those perceptions into organized pressure, and that long waves of militancy follow cycles of union revitalization driven by employer aggression, ideological renewal, and mobilizing leadership. Silver (2003) placed strike waves within a global political economy framework, showing that labor unrest tracks the rhythms of capital accumulation and tends to emerge where workers occupy structurally disruptive positions in production networks. Korpi (1974) developed the power resources approach, arguing that where organizational resources, institutional access, and favorable macroeconomic conditions coincide, mobilization becomes viable.

Subsequent scholarship has extended these foundations by examining what structural and institutional conditions drive strike activity over time. Hibbs (1976) demonstrated that strike volume declines where social democratic parties and corporatist

institutions channel conflict into political exchange, remaining more industrial where such institutions are absent. Godard (2011), building directly on the foundational accounts, developed four hypotheses about the structural decline in strike activity: displacement to other conflict forms, suppression through employer and state power, individualization, and latent conflict awaiting expression, arguing that all four are operative and calling for broader conceptualizations of industrial conflict. Biggs (2005), modeling strike waves as analogous to wildfire dynamics, demonstrates that waves are self-amplifying processes rather than aggregations of independent decisions: once a critical mass of strikes occurs, information about employers' revealed vulnerability and workers' demonstrated capacity propagates through organizational and community networks, inducing further action that the initial grievance conditions alone could not have generated. This cascade logic is consistent with the wave definition employed here: a wave is not simply many strikes, but a compounding escalation in which later strikes are partly caused by earlier ones, and implicitly requires the activated organizational channels through which signal can travel.

A related body of work has examined how institutional contexts shape the form and frequency of industrial conflict. Brandl and Traxler (2010) tested institutional predictions across OECD countries, finding that bargaining coordination level, union density, and institutional configurations systematically shape industrial conflict patterns. Gahan and Pekarek (2013) extended Kelly's mobilization framework by incorporating collective action framing from social movement theory, arguing that unions' strategic repertoires are shaped by ideational coordination resources as much as organizational

ones. Vandaele (2016) documented how institutional erosion under liberalization shifted strike repertoires across Western Europe toward political rather than purely economic forms, a shift confirmed by Gall (2013) across nine Western European economies, with strikes increasingly deployed as demonstrative tools against governments rather than as leverage against employers. Gall and Kirk (2018), examining the period immediately preceding the pandemic, document tightening constraints on UK strike action under the Trade Union Act 2016. Kallas (2023), drawing on the Cornell Labor Action Tracker, demonstrates that the form strikes take reflects the coordination capacity available to workers, with fixed-duration walkouts emerging as a strategic adaptation to limited structural power in decentralized environments.

A third line of scholarship has documented how organizational and political developments in the years before a wave shape the conditions under which one can emerge. Eidlin (2018), comparing the United States and Canada, demonstrates that the two countries developed fundamentally different labor-political configurations from similar institutional starting points, with US labor incorporated as an interest group and Canadian labor as a class representative, a divergence that shapes the distinct organizational trajectories documented in subsequent chapters. Blanc and Eidlin (2021) document how the 2018 US teachers' strikes reshaped moral economies around educational inequality through sustained mass disruption and worker-organizer intervention. Hertel-Fernandez, Naidu, and Reich (2021), using the same strikes as a natural experiment, provide causal evidence that pre-pandemic strike activity shifted public attitudes toward labor in ways that shaped the ground for subsequent escalation.

These accounts share a common explanatory architecture: strike waves arise when macroeconomic stress raises the cost of inaction, organizational resources are sufficient to sustain collective action, and political conditions do not rule it out. They share a focus on the structural conditions present at the time of mobilization. The pre-pandemic state of inter-organizational coordination networks, specifically whether those networks were being actively exercised for cross-sector mobilization prior to a shock's arrival, is not a dimension these frameworks were designed to examine.

Strikes as Strength, Strikes as Weakness

Strike waves are easy enough to conflate with labor's structural power. Classical industrial relations theory, however, treats strikes as analytically ambiguous. As Kelly (1998) notes, resorting to strike action may signal that workers lack sufficient bargaining leverage to secure gains through institutionalized negotiation. In this reading, the need to strike reflects structural constraints. At the same time, Thelen's (2014) analysis of liberalization demonstrates that in market-oriented institutional contexts, the narrowing of coordinated bargaining channels may increase the likelihood of disruptive contention even when underlying worker power remains constrained. In such settings, strikes can proliferate not because labor is strong, but because institutional mediation has weakened.

Recent scholarship reinforces this ambiguity. Tassinari and Maccarrone (2020), examining labor mobilization in precarious and platform sectors, show that contemporary strike activity often emerges in environments characterized by institutional fragility rather than consolidated power. Escalation in these contexts reflects strategic experimentation and risk acceptance under constraint, not necessarily a durable shift in structural strength.

Weber and Wasner (2023) provide a complementary analytical lens through their concept of "sellers' inflation": a three-stage process in which upstream commodity price shocks generate windfall profits for firms with market power, which then use the inflationary environment as cover to protect or expand margins; workers respond in a conflict stage, attempting to defend declining real wages. In Silver's (2003) typology, this corresponds to a Polanyi-type response: workers are not acting from a position of structural strength but reacting to the re-commodification of labor conditions by market forces. The implication is that a wave can arise from defensive mobilization, from the logic of protection rather than the logic of power, making strike wave occurrence a poor guide to the underlying strength of the labor movement producing it.

This ambiguity is central to the analytical puzzle: strike volume does not map cleanly onto structural power in either direction. Neither "strikes as strength" nor "strikes as weakness" can explain the post-pandemic strike wave in both the United States and Quebec at the same time. If strikes are understood as a sign of strength, that can explain the post-pandemic strike wave in Quebec, the case with the structurally strongest labor movement – but not the wave in the United States, with the structurally weakest movement. If strikes are understood as an expression of weakness, that produces the same problem but in reverse: we now have an explanation for the U.S. wave, but not the Quebec wave. If we accept both explanations – that strikes come from a place of strength or weakness – then structural strength no longer becomes a predictive variable. Instead of answering the question "strike wave, yes or no?", structural strength becomes a

consideration for developing causal pathways: what are the different pathways to a strike wave from movements that are structurally strong or structurally weak?

Institutionalist Accounts: Varieties of Capitalism and Comparative Capitalism

Hall and Soskice (2001) established the foundational distinction between Liberal Market Economies and Coordinated Market Economies, arguing that each type exhibits a coherent institutional logic that shapes firm behavior, wage-setting, and collective action. In LMEs, decentralized bargaining, weak employment protections, and competitive labor markets are expected to produce fragmented, episodic industrial conflict rather than synchronized waves. The VoC framework is not employed here as a causal explanation; it provides the basis for case selection, establishing that the six countries in this study share enough institutional heritage to make divergent outcomes theoretically significant rather than trivially expected.

The VoC framework has been substantially revised and challenged since its original formulation. Baccaro and Pontusson (2016) developed an alternative framework focused on growth model composition (the demand-side drivers of economic growth rather than production-regime institutions), arguing that this approach reveals cross-national variation that the LME/CME binary obscures. On their account, the UK operates a debt-financed consumption-led growth model that differs structurally from the US, while Ireland's FDI-led trajectory (Bohle and Regan, 2021) places it in a distinct category from both. Baccaro, Blyth, and Pontusson (2022) extended this argument, contending that growth models are sustained by coalitional arrangements and that different demand drivers produce distinct national trajectories cutting across VoC categories. In the cost-of-

living crisis context, this distinction helps explain why Germany (an export-led economy whose wage moderation discipline is embedded in pattern bargaining) responded to post-pandemic inflation through institutional wage coordination rather than open conflict, while the UK's consumption-led model, in which real wage recovery requires market pressure rather than institutional agreement, was resolved through industrial action; Höpner, Di Carlo, and Hassel (2024) provide the most systematic analysis of this divergence for the German case. Foster and Thelen (2025) demonstrate that the US has diverged from fellow LMEs through shifts in antitrust jurisprudence that have produced a distinctively oligopolistic competition model. Hacker, Hertel-Fernandez, Pierson, and Thelen (2022) argue that the US requires its own analytical framework centered on fragmented political institutions, asymmetric business-labor power, and ethno-racial divisions. Thelen (2019) documents how the US has developed uniquely extreme labor market deregulation relative to other LMEs, driven by configurations of business power and racial division specific to American political development.

A further challenge comes from the convergence thesis of Baccaro and Howell (2011, 2017), who argue that industrial relations across advanced economies have converged on a common neoliberal trajectory toward expanded employer discretion regardless of starting institutional configuration. Against this, Thelen (2014) and others have argued that liberalization takes distinctly different national forms rather than producing uniform convergence. Witt and Jackson (2016) tested VoC's empirical claims across 61 economies and found coherent institutional complementarities in only a small number of cases, with most exhibiting mixed profiles. Hay (2020) and Feldmann (2025)

have both argued that this internal diversity calls for treating LME classifications as analytical starting points rather than fixed descriptions, and that crisis conditions expose institutional elasticities that equilibrium-focused frameworks understate. Howell (2021) makes the related argument that the state's active role in constructing and reconstructing employment relations has been systematically undertheorized: coordination infrastructure is not simply inherited but actively built and dismantled through political decisions.

Subsequent scholarship has documented meaningful intra-LME variation across the dissertation's specific cases. Analyses of firm-level practices find differences between US, UK, and Australian employers in decision-making centralization and workforce management (Brewster et al., 2024). Union responses to platform work diverge across the UK, Canada, and Ireland based on regulatory context and organizational strategy (Duggan et al., 2024). Ireland has developed forms of coordinated company-level bargaining that produce wage outcomes exceeding sectoral norms despite its LME classification (Paolucci and Roche, 2024). O'sullivan et al. (2020) characterize Ireland as an "atypical" LME in which the state plays a more active regulatory role than LME theory predicts, while Andreosso-O'Callaghan, Lenihan, and McDonough (2016) argue that Ireland's FDI-focused model of development defies easy LME categorization altogether.

COVID-19 produced differentiation in job retention schemes and labor market interventions across LMEs (Carlin and Soskice, 2024; Hancké et al., 2021). Visser (2024) documents critical variation in collective bargaining trajectories within the LME family: Ireland had national social partnership from 1987 to 2008, Australia has undergone

contested enterprise bargaining reforms, New Zealand underwent radical deregulation in 1991, while the US, UK, and Canada never had central wage agreements. Witt et al. (2018), mapping business systems across 61 economies, find that most economies would be classified as "mixed" under Hall and Soskice, reinforcing that the LME category is an analytical starting point rather than a precise description. Thelen and Ibsen (2017) show that unions in different LME settings adopt fundamentally different strategies in the knowledge economy, with implications cutting across the LME/CME distinction. Ornston and Schulze-Cleven (2015), distinguishing between coordination (production-level cooperation, durable) and concertation (policy-level cooperation, state-facilitated but fragile), provide conceptual vocabulary directly applicable to the Irish case: Ireland's social partnership constituted concertation that collapsed in 2008, a distinction relevant to understanding the character of labor's organizational resources in the years preceding the pandemic.

This literature establishes two things simultaneously:

- First, the LME category is institutionally heterogeneous in ways that matter for collective action: Ireland's FDI-led model (Bohle and Regan, 2021; O'sullivan et al., 2020), Australia's enterprise bargaining architecture (Forsyth and McCrystal, 2023), the United States' distinctively hostile legal environment (Thelen, 2019; Hacker, Hertel-Fernandez, Pierson, and Thelen, 2022), and the UK's state-constructed industrial relations system (Howell, 2021) are meaningfully different institutional configurations within the LME family.

- Second, these six countries still continue to share enough institutional features to make them a coherent comparison universe: common law traditions, decentralized industrial relations, shareholder-oriented corporate governance, absence of coordinated wage-setting (Witt and Jackson, 2016). The shared LME baseline makes divergent outcomes analytically significant; the intra-LME heterogeneity the literature documents constitutes the institutional terrain on which the dissertation's independent variables operate.

This dissertation validates both the shared institutional structure and heterogeneity of LME's. In doing so, this analysis neither assumes a common outcome, nor rejects the LME as a meaningful concept. Rather, this analysis treats liberal market economies as a landscape where coordination is contingent, rather than embedded. The shared LME baseline is understood as defining a common coordination problem: in the absence of institutionalized mechanisms for synchronizing action across sectors, coordination is not embedded but must be constructed.

In this context, the activation state of inter-organizational networks becomes a conditioning factor for coordination as a widespread practice. The contribution is therefore not to reclassify these cases, but to specify what is distinctive about them analytically: within LME settings, where coordination is not institutionally guaranteed, variation in network activation produces variation in the practice of collective action.

Social Movement Theory and Organizational Networks

Diani (1992) defines social movements as networks of informal interaction among a plurality of individuals, groups, and organizations engaged in conflict over shared

stakes on the basis of a collective identity: a relational definition that situates the coordination network, rather than the individual actor or formal organization, as the primary unit of analysis. Diani (2003) further distinguishes between network structures that connect organizations in principle and the actual flow of resources, tactics, and decisions through those structures: a network that exists structurally but through which nothing is actively flowing is not producing coordination. This distinction between structural connectivity and operational activation provides the analytical foundation for the account developed below.

Tarrow (2011) situates collective action within cycles of contention, emphasizing that movements rise and fall not simply in response to grievances but in response to shifts in political opportunity and organizational capacity. The relational infrastructure connecting movement organizations, which Tarrow calls the networks of contention, shapes how quickly tactics and campaigns diffuse across contexts. Wang and Soule (2012) demonstrate empirically that organizational collaboration among social movement actors accelerates tactical diffusion: connected organizations adopt each other's repertoires more rapidly than isolated ones. These accounts establish that organizational networks matter for collective action outcomes and focus on network density and connectivity as the key structural variables.

Levesque and Murray (2010) apply related insights to union settings with greater precision, distinguishing between union power resources (internal solidarity, network embeddedness, narrative resources, and infrastructural resources) and strategic capabilities, specifically the capacity to translate those resources into effective action.

Their central claim is that resources alone are not sufficient; unions must be capable of deploying them. The capability they call intermediation involves fostering collaborative action and, in their phrase, activating networks. They explicitly acknowledge that unions can be embedded in networks without leveraging those embeddings, meaning the structural fact of connection does not guarantee its operational exercise. This resources/capabilities distinction has been extended in several directions. Doellgast, Lillie, and Pulignano (2018), comparing fourteen European countries, build directly on the resources/capabilities logic to show that coordination capacity across worker groups (core and precarious) constitutes the key variable determining whether institutional change produces solidarity or fragmentation. Carver and Doellgast (2021), synthesizing 56 case studies, develop the conditions under which coordination capacity translates into inclusive mobilization. Anner (2011), examining Latin American labor, extends the underlying logic by demonstrating that pre-existing conditions determine which coordination mechanisms are available when a crisis arrives.

This resources/capabilities distinction extends to the temporal dimension of network maintenance. Taylor's (1989) concept of abeyance structures, organizational forms that sustain movement infrastructure through periods of low mobilization, establishes that coordination networks have a developmental history: their current state reflects prior choices about maintenance, exercise, and investment across successive contention cycles. Voss and Sherman (2000) document a related dynamic in union revitalization, showing that organizations with existing infrastructure can remain strategically dormant for extended periods before environmental pressure and leadership

change trigger active deployment of that infrastructure. Ganz (2000), in his analysis of strategic capacity in the unionization of California agriculture, distinguishes between the resources an organization possesses and the strategic resourcefulness it deploys, arguing that organizations with comparable resources can produce dramatically different outcomes depending on whether and how those resources are brought to bear on a specific challenge. Together, these accounts establish that the activation state of coordination networks is a historically contingent variable, one that cannot be read off from organizational presence alone and that must be assessed at the specific moment when a shared shock arrives.

Maffie (2022) and Tassinari and Maccarrone (2020) document the specific ways in which the COVID-19 period catalyzed new organizing connections, particularly among workers in sectors previously peripheral to union structures, showing that the pandemic itself functioned as an organizational catalyst in some contexts.

As an extension of these contributions, a straightforward next step is to isolate whether inter-organizational ties were already being operationally exercised for cross-sector mobilization before a shared shock, in addition to examining how actors coordinate once mobilization is underway.

The Power Resources Approach and Associational Power

As part of the social movement literature, the Power Resources Approach (PRA) requires direct engagement, because this tradition most closely foreshadows the dissertation's argument.

Wright (2000) defined associational power as the various forms of power that result from the formation of collective organizations of workers, including unions, parties, works councils, and community organizations. His analytical apparatus treats associational power as a scalar quantity (a level that can be higher or lower), and he explicitly brackets the dynamic question, writing that his framework does not attempt to develop a dynamic theory of the causes of working-class power but only of the effects of such power.

Silver (2003) introduced an important qualification, noting that there is not a strict correspondence between workers' bargaining power and the actual use by workers of that power to struggle for better working and living conditions. Silver's empirical analyses show that workers with high structural power sometimes mobilize and sometimes do not. Korpi (1985) identified three stages of the power process: the mobilization of resources, the maintenance of resources in a form ready for use, and the application of resources, which is the closest classical-PRA analog to a latent/active distinction. Korpi's framework operates at the macro level of class power and welfare state development rather than at the meso level of inter-organizational coordination ties.

Schmalz, Ludwig, and Webster (2018) present an expanded four-fold PRA typology (structural, associational, institutional, and societal power) and call for the approach to be understood as requiring collective mobilization rather than merely resource possession. The tradition has continued developing in this direction. Arnholtz and Refslund (2024) advance to a five-type typology including coalitional power, and their 2022 article notes that the sheer number of union members is not enough to

characterize associational power; it also depends on whether members are active and willing to act, and on the effectiveness of coordination and internal cohesion. Ford and Gillan (2025), interpreting Arnholtz and Refslund's coalitional power concept, write of alliances once established and activated, explicitly distinguishing establishment from activation.

Frangi, Masi, and Poirier (2023), in their analysis of union societal networks in Quebec, document that labor movements may possess extensive ties to community organizations and social movement actors, what Schmalz et al. (2018) term societal power, without strategically deploying those ties for cross-sector mobilization. Their research identifies the underexploitation of societal network potential as a structural pattern rather than an exceptional failure: the ties exist, but remain ad hoc rather than operationally activated. This finding lends direct empirical support to the latent/active distinction developed above, demonstrating that the gap between network infrastructure and operational activation is observable and consequential in precisely the cases this study examines.

Goods, Veen, Barratt, and Smith (2024) have developed the most explicit activation-state language within the PRA tradition, arguing that consumers as a coalitional power resource exist in one of two states (latent and active) and can influence industrial relations systems when leveraged by other actors.

Brookes (2018, 2019) develops Coordination and Context-Appropriate Power (CCAP) theory, arguing that effective coordination among unions (intra- and inter-organizational) shapes the outcome of labor mobilization. CCAP asks how coordination

of mobilization determines what that mobilization achieves: it is a theory of how actors deploy coordination capacity as a crisis unfolds and contested outcomes are produced.

This dissertation uses a sequencing-based activation framework, however, which addresses a distinct question at a different temporal location: rather than asking how coordination shapes the outcome of mobilization, a sequencing-based activation framework analyzes the pre-existing activation state of coordination network to understand whether mobilization arises at all. The coordination that matters for this dissertation's argument precedes the crisis rather than running concurrent with it; it is a structural precondition that shapes how quickly and on what scale workers can respond to a shared shock with synchronized cross-sector action, even though actors may still attempt to build or repair coordination under crisis conditions.

This literature establishes that organizational networks matter for collective action: what unions can do is partly a function of who they are connected to and how those connections are maintained (Tarrow, 2011; Wang and Soule, 2012; Levesque and Murray, 2010). The PRA tradition has produced a set of conceptual building blocks (Silver's possession/use wedge, Korpi's mobilization-liquidity-application stages, Levesque and Murray's resources/capabilities distinction, and Goods et al.'s two-state model) that together point toward treating the operational state of coordination networks as a variable. How those ties operate over time, specifically whether they were being actively exercised for cross-sector mobilization at the moment a shock arrived, is the question the chapters that follow take up.

Two frameworks from historical institutionalism formalize the temporal logic implicit in the preceding account. Pierson (2000) establishes that timing and sequence are independently causal in political processes: the same conditions produce different outcomes depending on when they occur relative to each other, because early choices foreclose later options through increasing returns and path-dependent feedback. Capoccia and Kelemen (2007) refine this through the concept of critical junctures, moments at which normal institutional constraints on choice are loosened, making decisions taken under uncertainty consequential for long-run path-dependent trajectories. Both frameworks support the central temporal claim here: the activation state of coordination networks at shock onset is not simply a background condition but a temporally located variable whose causal weight depends on its position in a sequence. Whether those networks were operationally live before a shared shock arrived is what determines whether wave-level mobilization can emerge at all.

Tensions with the Present Case Set

Each of the three traditions surveyed above generates predictions that can be brought to bear on the post-pandemic case set. The empirical literature on post-pandemic labor outcomes (surveyed in the paragraphs below) has documented findings that stand in productive tension with those predictions. These are not contradictions that invalidate the theoretical traditions; they are tensions that point toward a dimension of the problem the existing frameworks were not designed to address, and that the dissertation's framework is designed to resolve.

Macroeconomic stress and political opportunity accounts predict that where economic grievances are sharpest, mobilization should be strongest. The post-pandemic period produced inflation, labor shortages, and real wage erosion across all six cases; Dobbins, Johnstone, Kahancová, Lamare, and Wilkinson (2023) document how this shared shock registered differently across institutional contexts. Australia reached a peak inflation rate of 7.8% in 2022; New Zealand reached 7.3%, as Eustace (2024) documents for Ireland as well, whose inflation trajectory closely tracked the United Kingdom's through 2022-2023. Researchers studying the post-pandemic period in the non-wave cases have documented outcomes that stand in tension with what the macroeconomic stress prediction would anticipate. Hamberger (2023) documents that 2022 was Australia's highest year for industrial disputes since 2012 (189 disputes with 197,000 working days lost), yet finds that post-pandemic averages remain consistent with the pre-pandemic decade baseline, representing a return to prior levels after the COVID-suppressed trough of 2020 rather than any escalation beyond them. Gavin (2022), reviewing Australian collective bargaining and union strategy during 2021, finds isolated strikes in transport and waterfront but no wave-scale action. Eustace (2024) notes explicitly that widespread industrial unrest in Ireland has been notable by its absence despite inflationary conditions comparable to the UK. Parker and Alakavuklar (2023), examining New Zealand unions in this period, find that organizational energy was directed toward Just Transition campaigns and civil society coalition-building rather than industrial action. Vandaele (2021), examining health and social care workers across countries, shows that acute grievance conditions in the care sector did not translate

uniformly into industrial action even where conditions were comparable. The tension these findings produce is straightforward: economic conditions in the non-wave cases were not materially different from conditions in the wave cases, which means macroeconomic stress alone does not differentiate wave from non-wave outcomes. Additional conditions are doing explanatory work.

A related tension arises from the character of the post-pandemic inflationary episode itself. Weber and Wasner (2023) characterize the 2021–2023 inflation as sellers' inflation, driven primarily by upstream commodity shocks and profit-margin expansion by firms with market power, rather than by demand-side wage pressure. The Transfer special issue coordinated by Tassinari, Di Carlo, Ibsen, and Molina (2024) synthesizes comparative evidence across multiple economies, finding that the post-pandemic labor upsurge was fundamentally defensive in character: workers were striking to recover purchasing power already eroded, not to advance gains from a position of strength. Among the cases examined here, Australia and New Zealand experienced peak inflation rates of 7.8% and 7.3% respectively in 2022, figures comparable to those recorded in the wave cases, while producing no wave-scale mobilization. This evidence sharpens the tension: comparable macroeconomic conditions produced divergent outcomes, and the defensive character of the conflict means the standard macroeconomic stress account cannot explain why comparable erosion generated different responses. The severity of the shared grievance was real; its translation into a wave required additional conditions that the grievance account was not designed to specify.

Union density and structural power accounts predict that where labor movements are organizationally strongest (highest density, best-resourced, most legally protected), the conditions for collective action are most favorable. Researchers documenting the post-pandemic US upsurge have produced findings that create a tension with this account. Kochan, Fine, Bronfenbrenner, Naidu, et al. (2023), drawing on the Worker Empowerment Research Network, document the breadth of the US post-pandemic upsurge in NLRB petitions, strikes, and new forms of worker activism across sectors. Isaac (2023), situating the upsurge within US labor history, and Minchin (2024), assessing its breadth, both contextualize the wave against decades of structural weakness, conditions the power resources framework would treat as prohibitive to mobilization. The United States, with union density of approximately 10% at pandemic onset, operating under right-to-work laws in many states and with a labor relations board under sustained institutional pressure, was by structural metrics the weakest labor movement in the study. Yet Kochan et al. (2023), Isaac (2023), and Minchin (2024) document a wave. At the same time, researchers studying higher-density cases document outcomes in the opposite direction. Paolucci and Roche (2024) document that Irish unions, with density more than double the US rate, successfully managed inflationary wage pressure through coordinated enterprise bargaining in 2022, with pay increases spiking sharply through negotiation rather than industrial action. Murphy (2025), examining Irish union strategy in the post-pandemic period, finds unions pursuing legislative campaigns as their primary mode of advancing worker interests. Ontario and British Columbia, with union densities substantially above the US figure and NDP provincial governments formally aligned with

labor for portions of this period, produced no wave. The tension between the structural power prediction and the post-pandemic empirical record points toward a variable beyond organizational strength as a stock measure.

Regime-type, VoC, and comparative capitalism explanations situate collective action within institutional frameworks that shape what actors can do and how conflict is channeled. Researchers studying post-pandemic outcomes within the LME family have documented variation that the framework was not designed to address. Forsyth and McCrystal (2023) show that Australia's enterprise bargaining architecture legally confined protected industrial action to single-employer negotiations before the 2022 Secure Jobs, Better Pay reforms, making cross-employer coordination structurally constrained, an institutional condition present both before and after the pandemic. Kent (2021) documents New Zealand's Fair Pay Agreements system as an institutional attempt to create sector-wide bargaining, passed in 2022 and repealed in 2023, with union energy directed toward this institutional innovation rather than strike mobilization. McCrystal (2019) documents the procedural constraints that make lawful strike action in Australia exceptionally difficult to sustain at scale. McLaughlin and Wright (2023) compare all three non-wave cases (Ireland, Australia, and New Zealand), finding that each has pursued an augmented model of pluralism combining stronger individual rights with institutional alternatives to collective bargaining. The within-Canada comparison produces the most direct tension. Hodder (2026), analyzing Canadian strike data from 1960 to 2024, documents that the post-pandemic surge in Canada was driven primarily by the Quebec common front, concentrated in one province while others sharing identical

federal conditions produced no equivalent escalation. Tucker (2025) documents this federal policy uniformity directly, showing Ontario workers facing the same federal economic environment as Quebec workers. Campolieti, Hebdon, and Dachis (2014) demonstrate that provincial legal frameworks shape industrial action patterns independently of economic conditions; Hennebert and Faulkner (2020) document that Quebec's distinct institutional context shapes how its labor movement conceives of and deploys strikes. The tension the within-Canada comparison creates is that regime type, held constant at the federal level, does not account for the divergence. The relevant variation appears to operate at a different level than what comparative capitalism frameworks have typically examined.

Social movement and network accounts establish that organizational ties accelerate mobilization and tactical diffusion, and that denser, more active inter-organizational networks produce stronger collective action (Tarrow, 2011; Wang and Soule, 2012; Levesque and Murray, 2010). Tucker's (2025) detailed documentation of Ontario's November 2022 coordination episode puts this prediction in a particular light. When the Ford government invoked the notwithstanding clause to legislatively suppress a CUPE education workers' strike, the CLC, OFL, and unions across all industries rallied behind education workers, planned escalating actions, and committed to a general strike within days, forcing repeal of the legislation. Tucker documents an unmistakable display of cross-sector coordination capacity. The tension his documentation creates is temporal: this coordination was reactive and crisis-triggered, assembled under extreme provocation two and a half years after pandemic onset. Ontario possessed the organizational

infrastructure for coordination; what Tucker's episode cannot establish is that this infrastructure was operationally live at the moment the pandemic arrived in March 2020. Hodder (2026) and Tucker (2025) together document that Quebec's common front, with its institutionalized practice of synchronized cross-sector bargaining, produced a wave that Ontario, with comparable infrastructure, did not. Isaac and Rose (2024), using time-series regression on all known US strikes and worker protests during 2021-2022, demonstrate that BLM demonstrations directly stimulated workplace protests and strikes with racial justice demands, which in turn catalyzed wider worker militancy, a cross-movement spillover pattern that depends on pre-existing operational connections across organizational boundaries. Walker (2025) documents how the UAWD caucus's internal reform of the UAW constituted a pre-wave organizational transformation necessary for the 2023 Stand-Up Strike; Lichtenstein (2024) traces the demonstration effects that followed. Hunt and Connolly (2023), based on 42 interviews across five UK unions, document pandemic-period coordination experimentation that built on pre-existing infrastructure. Della Porta, Chesta, and Cini (2022) demonstrate that the organizational forms and action repertoires available to workers depend on pre-existing inter-organizational connections. The tension the network accounts encounter is not structural but temporal: the question of whether organizational ties were being operationally exercised at the moment the shock arrived is not one the network accounts were designed to pose. Taken together, these studies suggest that broadly comparable coordination infrastructure existed across provinces, but that only Quebec's networks were

operationally exercised in the years before the pandemic – pointing to pre-shock activation as a plausible differentiating condition.

Across these traditions, the empirical literature on post-pandemic labor outcomes points to a consistent residual. The frameworks surveyed identify the structural and organizational conditions under which mobilization is possible, but do not distinguish whether inter-organizational coordination networks are operationally active at the moment a shared shock arrives. Variation in macroeconomic stress, institutional structure, organizational resources, and the presence of coordination infrastructure does not, on its own, account for the divergence observed across cases. The empirical record instead suggests a temporal distinction: whether coordination ties were being actively exercised for cross-sector mobilization at shock onset. The analysis that follows treats this activation state as a conditioning factor in explaining why wave-level mobilization emerged in some cases but not others.

Next Steps

The three bodies of literature surveyed above converge on a set of conditions (macroeconomic pressure, organizational resources, institutional context, and network structure) that explain much of the variation in strike activity across countries and over time. The post-pandemic case set introduces a more specific question that these conditions do not fully resolve: why did a shared exogenous shock produce wave-level mobilization in some institutionally comparable LMEs but not others, and why, within Canada, did Quebec experience such a wave while Ontario and British Columbia did not?

To answer this question, the within-Canada comparison is particularly useful because federal conditions are held constant, limiting the explanatory role of national-level macroeconomic and institutional variation. The remaining divergence suggests that differences in the pre-existing operational state of labor movement coordination networks, specifically whether inter-organizational ties were already being used for cross-sector mobilization, may play a conditioning role that existing frameworks do not isolate.

Within liberal market economies, this question takes on a specific form: coordination is neither institutionally embedded nor structurally precluded, but rather contested and contingent, such that whether coordination exists in practice depends on whether inter-organizational ties are being actively exercised.

The conceptual elements needed to address this question are present across the literatures reviewed. Silver's distinction between the possession and use of power, Korpi's mobilization–maintenance–application sequence, Levesque and Murray's resources/capabilities distinction, and Goods et al.'s latent/active formulation all indicate that organizational resources must be operationally deployed, not merely possessed, for mobilization to occur.

The contribution here is to consolidate these insights and formalize one specific implication that existing frameworks do not isolate: treating the activation state of inter-organizational coordination networks as an explicitly coded, temporally located variable. Rather than examining how coordination shapes mobilization once underway, the

analysis distinguishes whether coordination networks were already operationally active for cross-sector mobilization at the moment a shared shock arrived.

This shift reframes coordination as a pre-existing condition rather than an endogenous process, and specifies its causal role in temporal terms. Within the case set examined here, variation in the pre-shock activation state of coordination networks conditions whether a shared exogenous shock can be converted into wave-level, synchronized collective action at all.

III. Theory: Coordination, Networks, and Activation

Labor movement coordination, as used in this dissertation, refers to the extent to which dyadic networked relationships among labor organizations produce cross-local and cross-sector alignment and synchronized collective action. This definition requires unpacking, because coordination is a term that appears across several literatures with different referents.

Diani (1992) defines social movements as networks of informal interaction among a plurality of individuals, groups, and organizations, engaged in conflict over shared stakes on the basis of a collective identity. This relational definition is the appropriate starting point. What makes a labor movement capable of wave-level collective action is not the organizational strength of any single union, but rather the structure and activity of relationships among unions: the extent to which they share information, align timing, and escalate collectively. Diani (2003) further distinguishes between network structures that connect organizations in principle and the actual flow of resources, tactics, and decisions

through those structures. The distinction matters: a network that exists structurally but through which nothing is flowing is not producing coordination.

Labor movement coordination, as defined here, is an outcome property: a characteristic of observable dyadic inter-organizational behavior, rather than a property of formal institutional structure. A labor movement with dense formal affiliations and a unified confederation may or may not produce cross-sector synchronized action; a labor movement with weaker formal architecture may do so if informal relational ties are sufficiently active.

The concept is also analytically neutral: coordination capacity is a tool. It does not imply that the labor movement deploying it is inclusive, democratic, or representative of all workers. Grenier and Sauviat (2022), in their analysis of union societal networks in Quebec, document coordinated union power operating through dense ties to community organizations and social movement actors; this is a form of coordination that is both highly effective and, in their account, unevenly distributed across the workforce. The effectiveness of coordination and its normative character are separate questions; this dissertation addresses the former.

Networks, Activation, and Capacity

Three concepts are required to make the argument precise: coordination networks, network activation, and raw mobilizing capacity. These are analytically distinct, and their distinctions contribute to addressing the explanatory gaps identified in section II.

Coordination networks are the formal and informal relational ties among labor organizations that create the structural possibility of cross-organizational alignment. They

are the infrastructure of coordination: the affiliations, coalitions, joint campaigns, shared leadership relationships, and communication channels through which unions can, in principle, act together. Coordination networks can exist without being activated. Taylor's (1989) concept of abeyance structures, organizational forms that sustain movement infrastructure through periods of low mobilization, is directly relevant here. Abeyance structures maintain the relational architecture of a movement between periods of active contention, preserving the capacity for future mobilization without currently exercising it. Holland and Cable (2002) extend this framework, showing that abeyance is not simply a passive waiting state but an active process of maintenance that determines whether infrastructure survives to the next cycle of contention. The implication is that coordination networks have a history and that their current state reflects prior choices about maintenance and exercise.

Network activation is the dynamic state in which coordination networks are operationally exercised for cross-organizational mobilization within a defined time window. Activation, as used here, is time-bound. A network that was activated during one period of contention is not necessarily activated in a subsequent period.

Activation converts structural potential into observable labor movement coordination. In his analysis of strategic capacity in the unionization of California agriculture, Ganz (2000) distinguishes between the resources an organization possesses and the strategic resourcefulness it deploys, arguing that organizations with comparable resources can produce dramatically different outcomes depending on whether and how those resources are brought to bear on a specific challenge. Voss and Sherman (2000)

document a related dynamic in union revitalization, showing that organizations with existing infrastructure can remain strategically dormant for extended periods before environmental pressure and internal leadership changes trigger active deployment of that infrastructure. Szabó et al. (2023), examining trade union revitalization in Central and Eastern Europe after 2008, find that having power resources is not the same as deploying them effectively. This gap between infrastructure and activation is consequential.

Raw mobilizing capacity is the total organizational reach of a labor movement, measured in terms of membership, financial resources, and formal institutional presence, independent of whether cross-sector coordination networks are activated. Raw mobilizing capacity is held in this dissertation as a control variable rather than an independent variable. Its function is to preempt a specific objection: that wave outcomes simply track union density. As documented in Section II, raw mobilizing capacity does not predict wave outcomes in this case set. The US had low raw mobilizing capacity and experienced a wave; Ontario and British Columbia had comparatively higher raw mobilizing capacity and did not. The difficulty of using raw mobilizing capacity to predict these outcomes is itself a finding: these discrepancies between capacity and mobilization establish that what mattered in the post-pandemic period was not how much organizational infrastructure existed. but whether coordination networks were activated.

Sequencing

The formal causal claim of this dissertation is:

Exogenous Economic Shock * Premature Aid Rollback * Pre-Activated Coordination Networks → Proximate Strike Wave

However, the exogenous economic shock of the COVID-19 pandemic is common across all cases – so for this study, the exogenous economic shock is not actually a variable, in the sense that it does not vary. Instead, this is a shared baseline. This allows for a simplified model:

Premature Aid Rollback * Pre-Activated Coordination Networks → Proximate Strike Wave

This is a timing claim, not a threshold claim. The question is not how much coordination capacity a labor movement possesses but whether its coordination networks were operationally active at the moment the shock arrived. Pierson (2000) establishes that timing and sequence are independently causal in political processes - that the same conditions produce different outcomes depending on when they occur relative to each other. Capoccia and Kelemen (2007) refine this insight through the concept of critical junctures: moments at which the normal constraints on choice are loosened and decisions made under uncertainty produce path-dependent downstream consequences. Both frameworks support the central claim here: the activation state of coordination networks at shock onset is a temporally specific condition, and its presence or absence at that specific moment determines whether a shared shock translates into a wave.

Three network states map onto the cases in this study. The first is continuously active: coordination networks that have been operationally exercised across successive cycles of contention without a significant period of dormancy. The second is critically juncture-activated: networks that were latent prior to a specific catalyzing event and underwent activation during a prior shock, remaining active through to the COVID onset.

The third is latent at COVID onset: networks that exist structurally but were not operationally exercised for cross-sector mobilization at the moment the post-pandemic economic shock arrived.

The argument is that cases in the first two states produced waves when the shock arrived; cases in the third state did not, regardless of the severity of economic conditions or the density of formal union organization.

Equity and Inclusivity: What Labor Movement Coordination Is Not

The concept of labor movement coordination employed in this dissertation is analytically neutral. A strike wave, as defined here, refers to a pattern of synchronized and exceptional strike escalation across sectors within a bounded time period. It is not, in itself, a measure of equity, inclusivity, or democratic depth. Coordination describes the alignment and synchronization of collective actors; it does not evaluate the social composition or distributive consequences of that alignment.

This distinction is common in other domains. Militaries and corporations coordinate large-scale strategic action across divisions, branches, and subsidiaries, yet such institutions are understood as hierarchical without any implication of egalitarian governance or broad stakeholder representation. In both cases, coordination refers to the capacity to align actors toward synchronized action, not to the normative character of the organization. The same analytical separation applies here: labor movement coordination concerns whether actors are aligned and activated, not whether the movement is socially inclusive or distributionally just.

This bracketing is intended to be purely methodological, not dismissive. Equity and inclusivity are integral to understanding who participates in a strike wave, whose interests are foregrounded, which sectors mobilize, and how gains are distributed. They shape the social breadth, legitimacy, and durability of collective action. A strike wave concentrated in highly organized public-sector professions will differ substantially in its representational scope and distributive impact from one that incorporates precarious, migrant, or racialized workers. Equity and inclusivity are essential for analyzing the character and quality of strike waves, and subsequent chapters will engage with these dimensions.

However, the empirical question guiding this dissertation is narrower: why did strike waves occur in some comparable liberal market economies following a shared exogenous shock, but not in others? That is a question of occurrence rather than character. The argument advanced here is that the activation state of coordination networks conditions whether synchronized escalation becomes possible at all. Equity and inclusivity shape the composition, legitimacy, and long-term trajectory of a wave once it emerges, and their absence may undermine organizational credibility over time, but they are not treated here as causal determinants of whether a wave occurs in the first place.

Distinguishing equity and inclusivity as relevant, just not causal, also reveals the importance of understanding coordination networks as dyadic: coordination among multiple actors at some time, not necessarily all actors at all times. There is no expectation that any labor movement will ever be fully in lock-step in 100% unity, nor that such a movement will account for the interests of all; real-world experiences reveal

ample cases in which organizations pair up to pool their mobilization capacity, with or without input from (or benefits for) other actors in their respective movements. Labor movement coordination does not require unanimity; it simply requires coordination.

IV. Why Activation Varied

Activation sequencing identifies pre-pandemic network activation as the variable that, in conjunction with premature rollback, produces a wave. But stating that some cases had activated networks and others did not is only the first step. The deeper question is why activation varied – what historical and institutional processes produced activated networks in Quebec, the United Kingdom, and the United States, and what produced latent networks in Ontario, British Columbia, Australia, Ireland, and New Zealand.

Legal Differences

The legal frameworks across these jurisdictions produce three distinct configurations with predictable implications for the activation state of coordination networks at pandemic onset.

- Legally embedded activation (Quebec): Quebec's combination of anti-scab legislation since 1977 (Code du travail, s.109.1) and the legally embedded common front mechanism for public sector bargaining produces a system in which inter-organizational coordination for cross-sector action is not merely permitted but structurally required by the normal operation of the bargaining system. Quebec unions do not need to choose to activate coordination networks in response to a shock – the networks are active because the legal system operates through them routinely. The pre-pandemic period had seen

active common front organizing in anticipation of the next public sector bargaining round, ultimately producing the 2023 wave documented by Hodder (2026). This is the clearest case of pre-existing activation: the legal architecture makes activation the default state rather than a strategic choice requiring deliberate construction (Hennebert and Faulkner, 2020; Tucker, 2025; Campolieti, Hebdon, and Dachis, 2014).

- Legally constrained activation, requiring extra-legal channels (US, UK, BC, Ontario): The US, UK, BC, and Ontario systems all prohibit or fail to provide legally protected cross-sector or secondary action, confining protected industrial action to single-employer disputes. Cross-sector coordination networks can exist and be active, but they cannot express themselves through the primary legal mechanism of collective action – the protected strike. Instead, they operate through social movement infrastructure, political coalitions, and public campaign strategies. In the United States, Section 8(b)(4) of the Taft-Hartley Act prohibits secondary boycotts and sympathy strikes; in the UK, secondary action lost legal protection under the Employment Act 1980 and has not been restored under TULRCA 1992; in BC and Ontario, the Wagner Act model confines protected action to single-employer bargaining unit disputes with no common front mechanism. The activation that produced the US wave operated entirely through these extra-legal channels: BLM-labor connections, teachers' strike spillover, and UAW internal reform (Isaac and Rose, 2024; Blanc and Eidlin, 2021; Walker, 2025). The UK's Trade Union Act 2016 created additional administrative burdens – 50% turnout thresholds, 40% support thresholds in important public services, 14-day notice periods, 6-month ballot mandates – that paradoxically required unions to maintain higher levels of

organizational activation to clear them (Lyddon, 2025; Hodder and Mustchin, 2025). British Columbia's anti-scab legislation (BC Labour Relations Code, s.68, since 1993) raises the credibility of strike action above the Ontario level, but the absence of a common front mechanism means cross-sector coordination lacks the legally institutionalized channel that Quebec possesses, leaving BC unions reliant on the same voluntary extra-legal networks as the US and UK cases. Ontario arrives at the same position through active legislative dismantling: the Harris government's repeal of anti-scab provisions in 1995 and the Ford government's Bill 124 wage restraint legislation (2019) progressively raised the cost of exercising coordination capacity, pushing networks from active toward latent – as Tucker (2025) documents in the November 2022 CUPE episode demonstrates, the capacity remained, but it had not been operationally exercised when the pandemic arrived (Campolieti, Hebdon, and Dachis, 2014).

- Legal fragmentation (Australia, Ireland, New Zealand): In these cases, the legal architecture does not prohibit activation but does fragment it – leaving unions without legal mechanisms through which activated cross-sector networks can produce binding industrial outcomes. Australia's pre-2022 Fair Work Act confined protected industrial action to single-employer enterprise disputes (Forsyth and McCrystal, 2023; McCrystal, 2019), making cross-sector coordination legally irrelevant to bargaining outcomes even where it existed; Hamberger's (2023) documentation of Australia's 2022 uptick shows activation occurred, but the legal structure prevented it from cascading. Ireland's voluntarist system, combined with the collapse of Social Partnership in 2008, withdrew the institutional infrastructure that had coordinated union action across sectors, leaving

unions with no legal mechanism rewarding cross-sector coordination and a resulting strategic orientation toward legislative rather than industrial channels (Eustace, 2024; Murphy, 2025; Paolucci and Roche, 2024). New Zealand's Employment Contracts Act 1991 destroyed the organizational infrastructure for coordination; the ERA 2000 never restored multi-employer mechanisms; and the Fair Pay Agreements Act 2022 – potentially transformative for activation – was repealed in December 2023 before any agreement was concluded, leaving unions reliant on social movement and civil society coalition strategies that constituted network maintenance without industrial activation (Parker and Alakavuklar, 2023; Kent, 2021). Activation in configuration 3 jurisdictions does occur, but the legal fragmentation ensures it cannot accumulate into synchronized cross-sector escalation.

Critical Juncture: Great Recession Experience as Trigger

The Global Financial Crisis of 2008–09 functioned as a critical juncture for the US labor movement in ways it did not for Canada: it delegitimized the existing strategies of an already weakened institutional labor movement, created conditions in which new actors entered the organizing field from outside established union structures, and generated new cross-sector, extra-institutional organizing repertoires that would persist and compound through the following decade.

The specific pathway through which the GFC produced activated networks in the US runs through the private sector and is documented in Chapter II. The forcing mechanism was nationally coordinated employer opposition at scale: Amazon, Walmart, McDonald's, and Starbucks deployed centralized anti-union strategies that operated

across local and sectoral boundaries, making piecemeal, union-by-union responses inadequate. Workers and organizers were forced to build counter-coordination at comparable scale – an extra-institutional response that was reactive in origin but became transferable in application. The Fight for $15 campaign, which emerged in November 2012 from a coalition of SEIU, New York Communities for Change, and allied organizations, built cross-sector organizing infrastructure through repeated joint action spanning fast food, home care, airport, and retail workers across 190 cities by 2014 (CNN, 29 November 2012; Waging Nonviolence, 29 November 2012; NELP 2022). Labor Notes conferences, growing from under 1,000 attendees to 3,000 at the 2018 gathering, served as recurring cross-sector convergence points connecting public and private sector activists building parallel reform caucus networks (DiMaggio and Furman 2018). The Red for Ed teacher strikes of 2018–19 demonstrated that these network channels were operational and diffusible at scale – and produced UAWD, TDU's UPS Teamsters United network, and the Inside Organizer School as private-sector nodes that would go on to lead the post-pandemic wave. By 2019, US labor coordination networks had been activated through a decade of compounding crisis, campaign, and response. When the pandemic arrived, those circuits were live.

Canada's GFC experience did not produce an equivalent juncture. Canada's recession was milder, shorter, and absorbed through existing institutional channels without producing the kind of extended dislocation that delegitimizes established strategies and draws new actors into organizing fields (Statistics Canada 2010). The pressure that drove US workers toward extra-institutional coordination simply did not

materialize in Canada to the same degree, and without that pressure, the activation process that transformed the US labor movement's network status through the 2010s did not occur.

The United Kingdom's coordination networks were activated through a different pathway than the United States, but the structural logic is the same: a sustained external pressure event generated cross-sector alignment that exceeded what any bargaining table could contain, and that alignment was continuously exercised through to the pandemic's onset. This pathway is documented in detail in Chapter II; what follows is the account necessary to situate it comparatively.

The Cameron-Osborne austerity program, implemented from 2010 onward, was the activating pressure. A decade of public sector pay freezes – first a two-year nominal freeze, then a 1% annual cap extended through 2020 – eroded real wages by between 12% and 23% depending on grade, while NHS budgets, local government revenues, and public service staffing were simultaneously cut (NIESR 2017; Hills and Stewart 2016; CLES 2015). The scale and cross-sector character of the assault meant that no single union's contract dispute could address it. The grievance was inherently political – a government policy decision, not an employer's negotiating position – and responding to it required coordination across organizational boundaries rather than within them.

The TUC's sustained campaign infrastructure was the vehicle through which that coordination was exercised. The March for the Alternative in March 2011 drew between 250,000 and 500,000 workers from across public services – teachers alongside nurses, civil servants alongside firefighters – coordinated through TUC machinery (Gall 2012).

The November 30, 2011 public sector pensions strike brought approximately 2–2.5 million workers out across education, health, and civil service, closing 60% of England's schools and cancelling 6,000 hospital operations – the largest coordinated public-sector action since 1926 (Eurofound 2012; BBC 2011; LRD 2011). The People's Assembly Against Austerity, founded June 2013, maintained standing cross-sector coalition infrastructure continuously through the pre-pandemic period (People's Assembly 2013). The Trade Union Act 2016 shaped the form of this coordination without deactivating it: legal constraints pushed cross-sector alignment toward campaign channels rather than joint industrial action, but unions demonstrated sustained organizational capacity to navigate the new ballot thresholds, conducting 38,880 ballots between 2018 and 2023 and achieving 2,137 instances of strike action (Lyddon 2021; Gall 2025). When the pandemic arrived, the TUC's immediate pivot to coordinated furlough advocacy – successfully pressing for a scheme that ultimately supported 11.7 million jobs (House of Commons Library 2021) – was an exercise of the same cross-sector infrastructure that had been continuously maintained throughout the austerity decade. The circuits did not need to be rebuilt; they were already running.

This distinguishes the UK case sharply from Ontario and British Columbia, where organizational bandwidth was absorbed by litigation and institutional engagement rather than cross-sector mobilization. UK unions were not oriented inward toward their own legal defense – they were oriented outward, toward a shared political adversary whose decisions required cross-sector responses.

Australia presents a distinct activation pathway. Unlike the US and UK, where GFC-era dynamics drove network activation, Australia avoided recession entirely in 2009 through the Rudd government's stimulus package, widely assessed as among the most effective in the OECD (Treasury Australia 2011; RBA 2021). The Fair Work Act 2009, enacted during the crisis, restructured industrial relations toward an enterprise bargaining model that channeled disputes through employer-specific processes rather than industry-wide mechanisms, structurally reinforcing fragmentation of cross-sector coordination capacity. No GFC-era critical juncture produced activated networks in Australia.

What activated Australia's coordination networks was instead the ACTU's Change the Rules campaign, which ran from 2017 through the 2019 federal election. In September 2018, more than 1,700 delegates from 40 unions attended a mass meeting at the Melbourne Convention Centre and voted unanimously to hold an all-unions march, with workers from health, construction, education, public service, transport, and manufacturing all represented (Green Left Weekly 2018; Peoples Dispatch 2018). By April 2019, the campaign had produced nationwide protests in 14 centres, spent $25 million targeting 16 specific parliamentary seats, and compelled Prime Minister Scott Morrison and his entire government to publicly respond to a labor movement campaign that framed the election as a referendum on workers' rights (ACTU 2019; NSWTF 2018). The campaign's goals – restoration of penalty rates, a living wage, an end to casual work insecurity, and overhaul of collective bargaining laws – were explicitly legislative rather than contractual. By March 2020, Australia's labor coordination networks had been activated through three years of sustained cross-sector political campaigning, even

though that activation arrived through a domestic political cycle rather than through GFC inheritance.

Ireland's latency is the activation-sequencing framework's most analytically important boundary condition. Ireland experienced the most severe GFC of any case in the study – GDP declined by approximately 11% between 2008 and 2010, unemployment peaked at 15.1% by early 2012, and the IMF-EU Troika bailout programme imposed fiscal consolidation amounting to approximately 20% of GDP – yet produced latent rather than activated coordination networks (GFC Comparative Report 2026). The severity-alone account cannot explain this outcome. As Soifer (2012) establishes, severity creates permissive conditions for activation but does not determine the form or direction of the labor movement's response; the pre-existing ideological and institutional configuration of the movement shapes whether a crisis juncture produces activated networks or deeper institutional integration.

In Ireland, that configuration was social partnership. Ireland had operated national tripartite social partnership programmes from 1987 to 2009 – seven successive agreements built around centralized pay agreements and policy concessions – leaving union leaders deeply embedded in collaborative relationships with government and employers (Paolucci and Roche 2024). When the GFC hit, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and its major affiliates engaged in concessionary bargaining: the Croke Park Agreement of 2010 accepted significant pay cuts and staffing reductions in exchange for no compulsory redundancies (EJIR 2015). Senior union leaders explicitly rejected industrial confrontation as a strategic approach, channeling mobilizing energy back into

institutional negotiation rather than sustaining it as cross-sector coordination infrastructure (EJIR 2015). As Culpepper and Regan (2014) argue, Irish unions had nothing to offer to policymakers in terms of credible industrial action, having operated as social partners rather than as an oppositional coordination network for over two decades. Anti-austerity protest occurred but remained sporadic and extra-institutional (EJIR 2015). Ireland therefore enters the pandemic with latent networks not despite its GFC severity but because that severity was mediated by a pre-existing social partnership configuration that channeled labor's response inward rather than outward.

New Zealand's GFC was moderate – GDP declined by approximately 3.3% from Q1 2008 to Q2 2009, unemployment peaked below 7%, and no large-scale public sector retrenchment followed (RBA 2021). The GFC was not severe enough to generate critical juncture dynamics. What activated New Zealand's coordination networks was instead a domestic political cycle beginning in 2017–18. In 2018, more than 70,000 workers – the highest number since the late 1980s – walked off their jobs across genuinely distinct institutional domains: nurses, teachers, midwives, and government workers alongside bus drivers, cinema workers, fast food employees, airport engineers, and junior doctors (NZ Manufacturer 2019; NZLII 2020). The CTU's primary legislative objective entering the pandemic was the establishment of Fair Pay Agreements – sectoral bargaining legislation that would set industry-wide minimum standards regardless of union membership – goals that no single contract negotiation could achieve (NZLII 2020; CTU 2019). The Ardern government was compelled to publicly engage with a strike wave challenging its self-imposed budget responsibility commitments, with both Labour and National forced to

take public positions on its political implications (NZ Manufacturer 2019). New Zealand's networks were therefore activated before March 2020, but through a political cycle specific to 2017–19, not through GFC inheritance – meaning the framework must accommodate multiple activation pathways rather than a single GFC-as-juncture account.

The latency of coordination networks in Ontario and British Columbia is not simply the mirror image of US activation. Canadian labor law routes collective disputes through formal, provincially bounded institutional channels: back-to-work legislation, essential services designations, and structured conciliation processes create resolution pathways that contain disputes within sectoral tracks. The effect is that mobilization energy flows into formal institutional channels rather than across sectoral boundaries. The US regulatory environment, paradoxically, had no equivalent containment mechanism – its hostility to organized labor was haphazard and decentralized in ways that forced unions outward toward cross-sector solidarity and extra-institutional coordination. Canadian provincial law was constraining in ways that kept unions within formal channels precisely because those channels, while imperfect, were functional.

This dynamic was sharpened in Ontario specifically by the Ford Conservative government's 2018 passage of Bill 124, which capped public sector compensation increases at 1% annually for three years. Multiple public sector unions launched constitutional challenges that consumed substantial organizational bandwidth – leadership attention, legal resources, communications capacity, and strategic energy that might otherwise have been directed toward cross-sector mobilization were absorbed by litigation. The Ontario Superior Court struck down Bill 124 as unconstitutional in 2022,

vindicating the legal strategy, but the years of the challenge were also the years in which coordination networks needed to be activated if they were to be live when the pandemic arrived. They were not. British Columbia's situation was structurally similar but mechanically different: the BC NDP government elected in 2017 was formally labor-friendly, which paradoxically channeled organizational energy toward institutional dialogue rather than cross-sector mobilization. The result was the same – capacity oriented toward institutional arenas rather than cross-sector networks – achieved through accommodation rather than resistance.

Quebec confirms the causal logic from a different angle. The Common Front bargaining structure, in which major public sector unions coordinate across sectors in synchronized bargaining rounds with the provincial government, has been a feature of Quebec labor relations since the 1970s. It has never been deactivated. Through successive rounds of public sector bargaining, Quebec unions have maintained the organizational practice of cross-sector coordination: the shared calendars, the joint strategy sessions, the synchronized escalation that the Common Front model institutionalizes. When pandemic-era protections were withdrawn and real wages declined in 2021–23, the circuits were already live. The 2022–23 Common Front negotiation, in which over 420,000 public sector workers coordinated across education, healthcare, and social services, was not an unprecedented mobilization but the latest iteration of a coordination practice continuously maintained (Statistics Canada, CWLD database). The wave it produced was the output of activated networks encountering adequate grievance conditions.

Workers in Ontario and British Columbia were not legally prevented from participating in Quebec's coordination model; the insulation was structural rather than overtly legal. The Common Front is Quebec's institutional arrangement for a Quebec context; its presence or absence elsewhere in Canada has been a matter of organizational adoption, not automatic diffusion, and that adoption had not occurred. Ontario and British Columbia, with latent networks and identical federal pandemic aid conditions, produce the comparison that makes the mechanism visible: continuously activated networks, paired with prematurely rolled back pandemic aid, are jointly necessary for a post-pandemic strike wave.

V. Dissertation Roadmap

The chapters that follow develop the activation-sequencing argument through comparative historical analysis of each case, moving from the cases that establish the framework's core logic, through the cases that test its scope conditions, to the within-country comparison that provides its most demanding empirical test.

Chapter 2 – Hypotheses and Testing – outlines the method for testing the theory and argument developed in this chapter. This method of qualitative case analysis, paired with process-tracing, will determine the structure of the next three chapters after it.

Chapter 3 - United States and United Kingdom – examines the two archetypal wave cases and develops the activation account for each. The US is a particularly instructive case because the US labor movement was in the structurally weakest position to mobilize for a strike wave in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, with union density

of approximately 10% at pandemic onset and a legal environment that had systematically weakened collective bargaining rights through the preceding decade. The Janus v. AFSCME Supreme Court decision of 2018 extended right-to-work logic to public sector workers just two years before the pandemic, cutting into the financial foundation of some of the most institutionalized unions in the country and further eroding the structural base from which any wave would need to emerge. By every conventional metric, the US labor movement was the least likely in the study to produce a post-pandemic wave.

This chapter argues that the GFC functioned as a critical juncture for US labor, drawing new actors into organizing fields and compelling the development of extra-institutional coordination infrastructure – but through a specific mechanism that the structural weakness account obscures. Nationally coordinated employer opposition at companies like Amazon, Walmart, McDonald's, and Starbucks forced workers and organizers to build reactive counter-coordination at comparable national scale. The hostile-but-haphazard US regulatory environment paradoxically generated the cross-sector extra-institutional infrastructure that Canadian provincial law suppressed: because formal channels were unreliable, unions were pushed outward toward solidarity and coordination across sectoral boundaries rather than contained within them. The Fight for $15 campaign, emerging in 2012 and expanding through the mid-2010s to incorporate fast food, home care, airport, and retail workers under a shared legislative banner, built the coordination infrastructure through repeated joint action. The Red for Ed teacher strikes of 2018-2019, spreading through states with minimal union density through identifiable network channels, demonstrated that this infrastructure was operational and

diffusible at scale. Critically, the escalation already underway in 2018-2019 continued to deepen after the pandemic's onset rather than plateauing, establishing the post-pandemic period as a genuine further escalation from an already-rising trajectory rather than a return to a prior high.

The UK chapter develops a parallel activation account through the TUC's aggregation of institutionally distinct sectors – health, education, civil service, and local government – during the post-austerity organizing of the 2010s. The activation is anchored by the November 30, 2011 public sector pensions strike, which brought approximately 2-2.5 million workers out across education, health, and civil service in coordinated action – closing 60% of England's schools and cancelling 6,000 hospital operations – and represents the clearest dated marker of cross-sector network activation in the pre-pandemic record. The People's Assembly Against Austerity, launched in 2013, provided the sustained cross-sector coalition infrastructure linking unions across all major public service domains throughout the decade. The junior doctors' dispute of 2015-2016 demonstrated that austerity-era pressures were radicalizing new professional constituencies beyond traditional union strongholds, with 98% of BMA members voting to reject the government's proposed contract. The UCU university strikes of February-March 2018 across 65 universities, running concurrently with public sector pay campaigns in health and the civil service, were characterized in contemporary scholarship as a milestone for impending service sector strikes more broadly. The Trade Union Act 2016 shaped the form of this coordination without deactivating it: by pushing cross-sector alignment toward campaign channels rather than joint industrial action and requiring

disaggregated balloting at the employer level, it forced unions to build workplace-level organizing capacity that proved essential when the post-pandemic wave arrived.

Together, the US and UK cases illustrate the conjunctural logic: activated networks encountering premature rollback produce waves through distinct national activation pathways, and what the two cases share is pre-pandemic network activation rather than structural organizational strength. The US activated through GFC-induced extra-institutional organizing forced by hostile employer opposition; the UK activated through sustained cross-sector anti-austerity campaigning forced by a decade of government-imposed pay restraint. The mechanisms differ; the outcome – coordination networks that were operationally live when the post-pandemic shock arrived – is the same.

Chapter 4 – Ireland, Australia, and New Zealand – examines the three non-wave cases and develops the framework's scope conditions. Ireland presents a particularly important analytical challenge: with union density more than double the US rate, Ireland experienced not stability but a pronounced post-pandemic strike downturn. This chapter argues that Ireland's social partnership ideology channeled union organizational capacity toward concessionary bargaining during and after the GFC, producing demobilization rather than activation, suggesting that GFC severity is a permissive condition for activation rather than a sufficient one, and that the pre-existing ideological configuration of the labor movement shapes whether a crisis juncture produces activated networks or deepened institutional integration. Australia illustrates the sequencing logic from the other direction: pandemic-era protections were not rolled back prematurely, meaning the

first condition of the conjunction was not met, and without that triggering condition the question of network activation status does not arise. New Zealand presents a distinct non-wave logic. Strike activity escalated in 2018-2019 under the Ardern Labour government, whose accommodation of organized labor channeled union energy toward institutional engagement rather than cross-sector mobilization; crucially, post-pandemic activity in 2021-2024 did not escalate meaningfully beyond that pre-pandemic trajectory, producing no disjuncture that would warrant the designation of a post-pandemic wave. New Zealand's non-wave outcome therefore reflects the absence of further escalation from an already-elevated baseline rather than the absence of any labor movement activity, and the Ardern government's labor-friendly institutional accommodation helps account for why coordination networks entered the pandemic oriented inward rather than activated for cross-sector mobilization. Together, the three cases in this chapter illustrate that the conjunction can fail at either condition: where rollback was not premature, as in Australia, the triggering condition was absent; where networks were not activated, as in Ireland and New Zealand, the organizational condition was absent.

Chapter 5 – Canada: Quebec, Ontario, and British Columbia – develops a within-country comparison. All three provinces share a federal institutional framework, identical economic conditions, and the same rollback of pandemic-era federal supports, which means that variation in coordination network activation status is more directly observable here than in the cross-national comparisons the preceding chapters offer. This chapter documents Quebec's continuously activated Common Front infrastructure, maintained through successive synchronized public sector bargaining rounds since the 1970s and

never deactivated, alongside the regulatory containment mechanisms that kept Ontario's coordination networks oriented toward institutional and legal defense rather than cross-sector mobilization, and British Columbia's parallel dynamic of accommodation-induced latency under a labor-friendly provincial government. The Canada chapter brings the activation-sequencing argument into its sharpest focus: Quebec's wave and Ontario's and BC's restraint, unfolding under shared federal conditions, foreground network activation status as the variable that most directly accounts for divergent outcomes.

Chapter 6 – Conclusion – draws together the cross-case findings and states the dissertation's theoretical contribution to comparative capitalism and industrial relations scholarship. It synthesizes what the case chapters demonstrate collectively: that labor movement coordination is better understood as a dynamic variable with activation states than as a static institutional background condition, and that the sequencing of activation relative to shock onset rather than the quantity of coordination capacity shapes whether a shared grievance translates into a sustained cross-sector wave. The conclusion differentiates the activation-sequencing framework explicitly from the power resources and associational power traditions: the argument is not that activated networks possess more resources than latent ones, but that the same resources produce different outcomes depending on whether they were exercised for cross-domain mobilization before the shock arrived. It addresses the implications of the within-Canada comparison for subnational analysis, reflects on what the framework cannot explain, and identifies directions for future research on coordination network dynamics beyond the LME context.

CHAPTER 2: HYPOTHESIS AND TESTING

In the previous chapter, I laid out an argument for post-pandemic strike waves as a product of grievance intersecting with opportunity: economically premature rollback of pandemic-induced aid, coupled with labor movements whose coordination networks were already activated before the pandemic. In this chapter, I will present my process for testing that argument.

I. Case Selection and Universe of Cases

This dissertation compares six Liberal Market Economies – the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, Ireland, and New Zealand – disaggregated into eight analytical units by treating Quebec, Ontario, and British Columbia as separate cases within the Canadian federal system. The LME classification provides the appropriate comparison universe. All six countries share a common institutional heritage of common law traditions, decentralized industrial relations, and shareholder-oriented corporate governance, which means divergent outcomes cannot be attributed to fundamental differences in institutional type. Because the cases are institutionally comparable, the variation that remains – in strike wave outcomes – is analytically tractable rather than expected.

The within-Canada comparison is the one single test which controls for the most variables, demanding high attention to differences at the sub-national level. Quebec, Ontario, and British Columbia share a federal institutional framework, face identical macroeconomic conditions, and received the same rollback of pandemic-era federal

supports. IV1 does not vary across these three units; the Canadian federal government was the primary vehicle for pandemic-induced economic aid, and federal policy does not differ by province. What varies is IV2 – the activation status of labor movement coordination networks at pandemic onset. The within-Canada comparison therefore holds the first condition of the conjunction constant and isolates variation in the second, providing a more controlled test of the activation-sequencing argument than any cross-national comparison in the study can offer.

II. Dependent Variable: Strike Waves

Definitional Challenges

I conceptualize a strike wave as an episode in which strike activity spreads from actors who were previously on strike to actors who previously were not. The emphasis on spread is deliberate and analytically load-bearing: what distinguishes a wave from a spike, surge, or exceptional dispute is not the absolute magnitude of any single event but the process by which mobilization extends beyond its initial organizational locus to encompass actors and sectors that were previously quiescent.

This conceptualization draws directly on Biggs's (2003, 2005) contagion framework for collective mobilization. Biggs demonstrates that strike waves exhibit positive feedback dynamics: early strikes increase the probability of subsequent strikes by demonstrating feasibility, broadcasting tactical information, and signaling to non-striking workers that action is viable and not catastrophically costly. A wave, on this account, is not simply a period of high strike activity – it is a period in which strikes

cause other strikes, in which mobilization diffuses outward rather than remaining contained. Andrews and Biggs (2006) extend this framework by identifying the channels through which diffusion operates, showing that what drives spread is not the scale of existing membership but the presence of a cadre of activists connected across organizational boundaries. Diffusion, in other words, is a property of network structure, not organizational size – a finding directly relevant to the argument developed in this dissertation.

Chang and Lee (2021) provide the most developed empirical operationalization of the distinction between intensity and diffusion in protest cycles. Reconceptualizing protest cycles as populations of interlinked events connected by documented inspirational links, they distinguish between degree centrality (events that directly inspire many subsequent actions within the same sector or community) and betweenness centrality (events that bridge previously disconnected parts of the movement). On their framework, a protest cycle requires both: momentum within sectors and expansion across them. An event, however large, that generates no traceable cross-sector descendants is an isolated node, not a wave. This distinction maps directly onto the operationalization developed below: the requirement that post-pandemic exceptionalism be established across multiple metrics, multiple years, and multiple instances is a statistical proxy for Chang and Lee's bridging criterion – evidence that escalation crossed organizational and sectoral boundaries rather than remaining concentrated within a single dispute.

This conceptualization has parallels with other literatures that use "wave" language. The democratization literature, for instance, uses "waves of democratization"

to refer to the diffusion of popular mobilization and constitutional change across multiple states within a bounded historical window. Like the democratization literature, a strike wave involves within-unit diffusion – from sectors and organizations engaging in strike activity before the wave period to counterparts who begin engaging in strike activity during it. The analogy has limits: unlike waves of democratization, a strike wave in one jurisdiction does not connote cross-border spread. A wave in Quebec carries no expectation of diffusion to Ontario or Massachusetts. The relevant unit of diffusion is the labor movement within a bounded political economy, not the international system.

Strike waves are frequently invoked in industrial relations scholarship but rarely defined with precision. Scholarship tends to focus less on defining what constitutes a strike wave and more on analyzing cases already labeled as such. Studies of the post-pandemic waves in the United Kingdom (Hodder & Mustchin 2024) and the United States (Rutherford 2024) justify the designation by pointing to evident increases in major strike activity metrics without specifying how much increase is required to cross the threshold from notable escalation to wave. Hodder and Mustchin (2024) explicitly document this problem as a feature of the literature rather than an oversight of any individual study, noting that the UK wave designation is grounded in the self-evident character of the data against historical baselines rather than in any threshold test. The same pattern characterizes analyses of late 20th-century waves (Lyddon 2007) and the post-Global Financial Crisis activity that Colatrella (2011) describes as a worldwide strike wave on the basis of cross-national simultaneity and anti-austerity character rather than formal quantitative criteria. As Shorter and Tilly themselves acknowledged, “strikes

are a little like any other complex social phenomenon, in defying a single measure of magnitude" (1974: 358). What the field has converged on instead is a three-metric standard – number of work stoppages, workers involved, and working days lost – that captures the breadth, depth, and intensity of industrial conflict. Agreement on these three indicators as the appropriate empirical basis is, as Lyddon (2007), Dribbusch and Vandaele (2016), Hodder and Mustchin (2024), and Hodder (2026) each confirm, the one area of genuine methodological consensus in the strike-statistics literature.

The closest thing to a canonical quantitative definition comes from Shorter and Tilly (1974), who define a strike wave as a period in which both the number of work stoppages and the number of workers involved grow by at least 50% relative to the average for the previous five years. This definition stands out for its specificity, and it has occasionally resurfaced in subsequent scholarship (e.g., Biggs 2005). However, applying it to 21st-century liberal market economies presents two problems that compound each other.

The first is the baseline problem. The Shorter–Tilly threshold is calibrated to 20th-century France – a historically strike-prone environment in which the 50% benchmark represented genuine departure from established baseline activity. In post-neoliberal LMEs, where decades of institutional erosion have compressed baseline strike activity to historically low levels, the 50% threshold is far more easily reached: a small absolute increase from a low base produces large percentage gains. Vandaele (2016) documents precisely this dynamic in his comparative analysis of European strike trends, showing that the structural transformation of industrial relations across the LME

world since the 1990s has produced baseline conditions under which percentage-change benchmarks designed for high-conflict environments generate misleading results. The result is systematic false-positive risk – cases that technically meet the threshold during what are, against a longer historical view, relatively calm periods.

The second problem is its vulnerability to year-by-year fluctuations in the five-year comparison window. A single low-activity year in the baseline period artificially deflates the comparison average, making it easier for subsequent years to exceed the 50% threshold without any genuine escalation. The real story in such cases is the trough that preceded the apparent growth – not a wave, but a return toward a historical mean following an anomalous dip. Hodder and Mustchin (2024) flag a parallel issue in the UK context, noting that changes in strike-data collection during the pandemic period create baseline problems that can distort longitudinal comparisons if not handled carefully. Ireland illustrates the substantive problem vividly: applying the Shorter–Tilly threshold with a five-year baseline produces wave designations for multiple years in the 21st century that do not survive comparison to the full prior decade's activity, revealing themselves as rebounds from exceptionally low preceding years rather than genuine episodes of expanded mobilization.

Together, these problems – baseline compression and temporal instability – call for a definition anchored in a longer comparison window, guarded against single-event distortion, and requiring evidence of expanded scope of conflict across dimensions rather than aggregate exceedance on one metric in one year.

Criteria Defined

This dissertation proposes a two-criterion definition which draws on the field's three-metric consensus as its empirical foundation, while building in structural protections against baseline compression and temporal instability.

Criterion 1 – Robust exceptionalism against the prior decade. For the post-pandemic period (2021-2024), strike activity must be robustly exceptional relative to the decade prior (2010-2019).

This is operationalized across three standard metrics tracked by national and international labor statistics agencies: number of work stoppages; the number of workers involved in work stoppages; and the number of working days lost to labor disputes. These metrics capture distinct dimensions of collective action: respectively, the breadth, depth, and duration of industrial conflict. Robust exceptionalism requires that post-pandemic values not merely exceed the prior decade's average but exceed its peak values across multiple metrics, establishing that the post-pandemic period represents a genuine discontinuity rather than a return to a prior high. As a checklist, I focus on the following indicators:

- Is there at least one year from 2021-2024 in which at least one metric exceeds the 2010-2019 average by at least 100%? Without this, a case lacks widespread exceptionalism relative to its own recent historical baseline.
- Are there at least three instances from 2021-2024 in which a country has some strike activity metric exceeding the maximum value from 2010-2019? Without this, a case lacks peak exceptionalism.

- Do the averages of all three key metrics from 2021-2024 at least match the averages from 2010-2019? If any metric shows a decline, this opens up the possibility that activity following the pandemic is not a wave or spike, but rather a shifting of tactics: e.g. from more, smaller strikes to fewer, larger strikes – in which we would witness an increase in working days lost, alongside a decline in number of work stoppages.

Taken together, the three sub-checks operationalize what the diffusion literature identifies as the defining properties of a genuine wave: expanded scope of conflict across time, across actors, and across dimensions of collective action simultaneously.

The 100% average-exceedance test establishes that post-pandemic activity reached genuine exceptionalism rather than marginal growth. The peak-exceptionalism requirement (three instances in which a metric surpasses the prior decade's maximum) is where the definition most directly draws on Biggs's (2003, 2005) contagion model of strike-wave dynamics: on Biggs's account, what distinguishes a wave from a spike is positive feedback, wherein early mobilization generates subsequent mobilization by demonstrating feasibility, broadcasting tactical knowledge, and expanding the perceived opportunity for actors who were previously not striking. That process is multidirectional and temporally extended. A single-event vector can produce extraordinary statistics confined to a bounded organizational space and a single time window. It cannot, without subsequent diffusion, produce multiple successive instances of peak-exceeding activity across the dataset as a whole.

Requiring three instances rather than one or two introduces a structural buffer against this false-positive risk: a case in which one extraordinary event briefly inflates two metrics in the same year but generates no further escalation will, at most, produce two peak-exceeding instances. The third must come from somewhere else, either a different year or a different metric driven by a different underlying event, and that requirement is what distinguishes diffusion from concentration.

The no-decline requirement on all three metric averages performs a complementary function: it guards against the possibility that aggregate exceptionalism conceals a tactical narrowing rather than an expansion of conflict. A pattern in which working days lost rises dramatically while work stoppages fall is more parsimoniously read as fewer, larger disputes: a contraction in the breadth of conflict even as its intensity increases in a specific channel, rather than as a wave extending across previously non-striking actors.

Criterion 2 – Disjuncture from Pre-Pandemic Trends. Strike activity must exhibit a clear break from the trajectory established in the years immediately preceding the pandemic. The reference years are 2018 and 2019: the two full years before COVID-19 disrupted labor markets.

A country may have robust post-pandemic metrics (2021-2024) relative to the decade prior (2010-2019), but if post-2020 activity levels do not meaningfully differ from the years immediately preceding the pandemic, then what is missing is escalation triggered by pandemic/post-pandemic conditions. In other words, there may be elevated strike activity, and there may even be a strike wave, but such a wave does not meet the

"post-" part of a "post-pandemic strike wave." In such cases, the question is, why did post-pandemic conditions not trigger additional escalation for a labor movement which already demonstrated a present capacity to mobilize concerted strike activity?

Together, these criteria identify cases where strike activity broke sharply upward from recent trends and remained elevated at historically exceptional levels: a pattern that warrants the term "wave" rather than fluctuation, surge, or recovery; and which legitimately follow the onset of the pandemic, rather than preceding it.

III. Independent Variables

Independent Variable (IV1): Premature Rollback of Pandemic-Era Protections

This variable captures whether the timing of pandemic aid withdrawal was defensible on macroeconomic grounds, or occurred in spite of macroeconomic indicators that warranted continued support.

The concept of premature rollback requires a standard to assess timing: the macroeconomic condition of workers at the point of withdrawal – specifically, whether real wages had recovered to pre-pandemic levels and whether inflation had returned to target ranges. Where withdrawal occurred while inflation was still eroding real wages, the timing is coded premature. Where withdrawal occurred after real wages had stabilized and inflation had resolved, the timing is coded as not premature.

The distinction captures a meaningful difference in government intent and effect. Premature rollback is not the same as rollback per se: all six cases eventually withdrew pandemic supports. The variable is whether the withdrawal preceded or followed the

resolution of the conditions that made those supports necessary. A government withdrawing income supports while CPI is running at 7-9% and real wages are declining is making a different policy choice – with different consequences for worker grievance – than a government maintaining supports through the inflationary period and withdrawing them once wage growth has caught up.

Rollback will be coded as premature unless both conditions apply:

- Condition 1: Real wages had recovered to pre-pandemic levels.
- Condition 2: Inflation had returned to target ranges.

Evidence for premature rollback include:

- Documentation that income support programs were withdrawn while inflation remained above target and real wage growth was negative.
- Wage settlement data showing that collective agreements reached during the withdrawal period failed to keep pace with cost of living.
- Explicit government statements prioritizing fiscal consolidation or labor market participation incentives over income protection during inflationary periods.
- Worker and union statements explicitly framing grievances around the gap between pandemic-era expectations and post-pandemic economic reality.
- Documentation that support programs were extended or restructured to track inflation. Wage review mechanisms (such as the Australian Fair Work Commission's annual minimum wage review) that adjusted floors in real time.

- Collective bargaining settlements that produced positive real wage outcomes during the post-pandemic period.

Independent Variable (IV2): Pre-Pandemic Activation of Labor Movement Coordination Networks

This variable captures whether coordination networks within a labor movement were operationally activated – that is, exercised for cross-sector mobilization – before the pandemic, or whether that activation process was still underway or had not yet begun when COVID-19 arrived. A network is coded activated where three conditions are simultaneously satisfied in the period before March 2020:

- Condition 1: The coordination brings together workers from more than one distinct world of work - people whose jobs, employers, and rules governing their employment are genuinely different from each other.
- Condition 2: The coordination is reaching for something that a contract negotiation could never deliver on its own.
- Condition 3: The coordination produces a public political event that prompts political actors outside the bargaining relationship to respond publicly.

A coordination network is coded activated if, in the period leading into the COVID-19 pandemic, there is documented evidence of cross-organizational mobilization being exercised through network ties. March 2020 is the hard evidentiary cutoff: no evidence from after this date may be used to code activation status. This protocol is essential to prevent circularity: inferring pre-pandemic activation from the occurrence of a subsequent wave is not evidence, as it is restatement of the outcome. The protocol

ensures that IV2 codings are independently verifiable – any reader can replicate the activation coding for any case by consulting pre-cutoff sources alone, without reference to subsequent strike activity. Where the historical record is ambiguous, the coding errs toward latent rather than activated, since the burden of proof for the dissertation's positive claim rests on demonstrating activation, not its absence.

Activation indicators within the pre-shock window: A network is coded latent when institutional infrastructure exists – federations, inter-union coalitions, leadership overlap – but the pre-shock window contains no evidence of that infrastructure being exercised for cross-sector mobilization. Latency does not mean absence of infrastructure or absence of capacity. It means the structural potential for coordination was not operationally deployed when the shock arrived.

A supplementary dimension captures strategic orientation in the pre-shock period: whether organizational capacity was directed toward outward cross-sector mobilization or toward inward institutional arenas. This matters because latent status is not always the product of organizational weakness; it can reflect rational strategic allocation of finite resources toward defensive institutional challenges that crowd out mobilizational preparation. Where a labor movement's organizational bandwidth was absorbed by litigation, electoral campaigns, or sector-specific bargaining defense in the pre-shock period, the latency of its coordination networks reflects a strategic configuration rather than a structural deficit.

Evidence for activated status: Coding is organized around the three conditions above. For Condition 1, the relevant evidence is documentation of joint campaigns or

actions in which workers from genuinely distinct employment contexts – different employers, workplaces, and governing frameworks – participated together; organizational communications indicating deliberate cross-sector coordination rather than coincidental timing. For Condition 2, the relevant evidence is documentation that the coordination explicitly targeted statutory change, government policy, or legislative outcomes that no single employer contract could produce; demands or campaign materials establishing that the coordination was reaching beyond the bargaining table. For Condition 3, the relevant evidence is contemporaneous news coverage, parliamentary or congressional records, electoral commentary, or government statements showing that political actors outside the bargaining relationship were publicly compelled to respond to the coordinated action.

Evidence for latent status: A case is coded latent when the evidence shows that each of the three activation conditions went unsatisfied in the pre-pandemic window. For Condition 1: disputes remained within a single sector, employer, or legislative framework, with no documented cross-sector co-participation. For Condition 2: coordination targeted wages, staffing, or working conditions addressable through existing bargaining procedures, with no documented campaign goals requiring legislative or governmental action beyond the bargaining relationship. For Condition 3: any governmental response was confined to the responsible sectoral minister acting in a routine managerial capacity – not a public political intervention by actors from outside the employment relationship. Where applicable, documentation that organizational leadership bandwidth was absorbed by litigation, constitutional challenges, or sector-

specific bargaining defense further supports a latent coding, because it identifies the mechanism by which structural coordination capacity went unexercised.

IV. Methods Overview: QCA and Process Tracing

Two complementary methods structure the analysis. Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) establishes the cross-case Boolean pattern: across all eight analytical units, it determines whether the conjunction of premature rollback and pre-activated coordination networks is necessary and sufficient for the wave outcome, and whether either condition alone is sufficient. Process tracing then establishes the causal mechanisms within cases – how the conjunction produced or failed to produce a wave through the specific historical pathways documented in each case chapter. The division of labor is precise: QCA answers whether the conjunctural pattern holds across the full case set; process tracing answers whether the posited mechanism actually operates within individual cases. Neither method is sufficient without the other. QCA without process tracing establishes pattern without mechanism; process tracing without QCA risks privileging case-specific detail at the expense of cross-case generalizability. A formal design commitment governs IV2 coding throughout: activation status is coded exclusively on evidence predating March 2020, with no post-pandemic labor activity permitted as evidence of pre-pandemic network state. The full operationalization of this anti-circularity protocol appears in the IV2 variable definition.

Hypotheses

Three hypotheses are posed as competing explanations for the pattern of wave and non-wave outcomes documented above. They are competing rather than complementary: each makes distinct predictions about which variables drive wave occurrence, and those predictions diverge sharply on the cases that most distinguish the explanations.

H1 (Rollback Hypothesis)

This hypothesis posits that post-pandemic strike waves arose where governments prematurely withdrew pandemic-induced economic protections before labor markets had stabilized. This dissertation began under the assumption of the Rollback Hypothesis. This explanation is parsimonious, and it is politically intuitive: the proximate grievances workers articulated in wave cases centered on real wage erosion, expiring income supports, and the widening gap between pandemic-era expectations and post-pandemic economic reality. And crucially, when the analysis is conducted at the national level across the six cases, the Rollback Hypothesis initially appears to fit. Australia and New Zealand maintained pandemic-induced protections for longer and experienced no waves. Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States withdrew protections more rapidly and experienced waves. No national cases directly contradict this reading.

This initial reading suggested that the post-pandemic strike wave story was, fundamentally, a story about governments and policymakers: specifically, about policymakers misreading labor movements. On this account, the governments that avoided waves did so not because their labor movements were weaker or less motivated,

but because they provided sufficient economic cushioning to absorb the post-pandemic adjustment. The governments that triggered waves did so by withdrawing that cushioning before the conditions that had created it (inflation, real wage losses, labor shortages) had resolved. The labor movement, on this reading, was responding rationally to conditions governments had created; the variation in outcomes reflected variation in government policy rather than variation in labor movement characteristics.

The problem with this explanation emerges not from cross-national comparison but from within Canada. Canada's post-pandemic strike wave was not nationally uniform. It was geographically concentrated in the province of Quebec. When provincial strike data are examined, Quebec is the only province in which both the average and maximum values for work stoppages and days lost from 2021-2024 exceed their counterparts from the pre-pandemic decade. Every other province either had lower post-pandemic averages or lower post-pandemic maximum values than their pre-pandemic equivalents. Canada recorded a maximum of 272 work stoppages in 2023 and 2024, below a pre-COVID maximum of 281 in 2012 (StatCan). Canada's national wave is, on closer inspection, primarily a Quebec wave that pulls national averages upward.

This internal geographic concentration is problematic for a pure Rollback account. Ontario and British Columbia, Canada's two other largest provinces, experienced the same federal economic conditions as Quebec in 2021-2023. They faced the same inflation trajectory, the same expiration of federal income supports, the same post-pandemic wage environment. Federal policy does not vary by province. If premature rollback were sufficient to produce a wave, Ontario and British Columbia should have

produced one. They did not. Something distinguishes Quebec from the rest of Canada that cannot be explained by federal policy or national economic conditions. This forces the analysis toward an explanation that incorporates characteristics of labor movements themselves, not only the policy environments in which they operate.

This hypothesis would be falsified by a case with no wave, despite premature rollback comparable to wave cases. British Columbia provides this exact falsification.

H2 (Activation Sequencing Hypothesis)

Under this hypothesis, post-pandemic strike waves arose where premature rollback coincided with labor movements whose coordination networks were already activated prior to the pandemic. H2 builds on H1 rather than replacing it. Premature rollback is retained as a necessary condition: where the duration of pandemic-induced aid is macroeconomically defensible (not necessarily optimal, just defensible), no wave occurred regardless of coordination network status. But rollback alone is insufficient. The additional condition is that labor movement coordination networks must have been activated – and operationally exercised for cross-sector mobilization – before the pandemic arrived. The conjunction of both conditions produces a wave.

The theoretical logic is straightforward. Premature rollback creates a grievance: the material conditions for collective action are present, real wages are falling, and the state has withdrawn the protections that were absorbing the cost. But grievance without organizational capacity for synchronized escalation produces isolated disputes rather than waves. The question is not whether workers are motivated – they are motivated across all the cases where rollback occurred, including Ontario and British Columbia. The question

is whether the relational infrastructure for cross-sector coordination was already exercised and live when the grievance arrived.

Where coordination networks were pre-activated, the grievance met an opportunity: an existing organizational capacity for synchronized escalation that could be deployed rapidly. Where coordination networks were latent – structurally present but not mobilizationally exercised in the pre-pandemic period – the pandemic did not suppress a wave so much as it triggered the process by which activation would begin. Ontario and British Columbia did not fail to produce a wave because their labor movements were weak. They did not produce a wave in 2021-2023 because their coordination networks were going through the activation process that the US and UK labor movements had already completed in the preceding decade, and that Quebec's labor movement had never needed to complete because it had never deactivated. This framing makes clear what the key variable is: not whether coordination networks exist, but when they were activated relative to the shock. The sequencing is the mechanism.

H3 (Mobilization Capacity Hypothesis)

In this hypothesis, strike waves arose where labor movements had high pre-existing mobilization capacity. H3's prediction follows from the power resources tradition. Denser, better-resourced, legally protected unions are structurally better positioned to mobilize workers into collective action. Where union membership is high, financial resources are substantial, and legal frameworks protect the right to strike and bargain collectively, workers can act on their grievances. Even with acute grievance, collective action is harder to sustain with low density and weak legal protections.

This is an intuitive and historically well-grounded expectation. Over the long run, union density does predict strike activity. Countries with stronger labor movements have, historically, had higher rates of industrial conflict. H3 states what any observer of industrial relations in 2019 would have predicted about the post-pandemic period: the countries with the strongest labor movements, the highest density, the most institutionalized bargaining structures, the most legally protected right to strike, would be the most likely to experience post-pandemic waves.

H3 would be supported by evidence that wave cases systematically have higher union density, stronger institutional protections, and greater organizational resources than non-wave cases. However, H3's strongest refutation is the United States. At approximately 10% union density in 2020 (the lowest of any case in this study), the US labor movement presented the weakest structural profile. Right-to-work laws in many states allow workers to benefit from collectively bargained contracts without contributing to union finances, systematically undermining the resource base of organizing efforts. The Janus v. AFSCME Supreme Court decision (2018) extends this logic to public sector workers, removing previous protections on mandatory dues and cutting into the financial foundation of some of the most institutionalized unions in the country. The National Labor Relations Board, the federal body responsible for enforcing collective bargaining rights, faced sustained institutional pressure and reduced operational capacity in the years preceding the pandemic. By every structural metric that H3 predicts should matter, the US labor movement was the least likely in the study to produce a post-pandemic wave. Yet the US produced a wave. And Ontario and British Columbia, with higher union

density, more institutionally protected bargaining rights, and NDP provincial governments formally aligned with labor for portions of this period, produced no wave.

H3 is instructive for two reasons. First, it establishes the baseline from which the post-pandemic period deviates. If mobilization capacity predicted wave outcomes, the expected pattern would look nothing like the observed pattern. Documenting that divergence precisely – showing where capacity was high and no wave occurred, and where it was low and a wave occurred – is the empirical foundation for the claim that something other than structural capacity was operative. Second, understanding the specific circumstances behind the US deviation from H3's prediction is analytically productive rather than merely anomalous. Why did low density and a hostile legal environment not prevent a wave in the US? The answer to that question is itself part of the causal explanation this dissertation advances.

V. Process-Tracing Methodology

Process-tracing is the core analytical method used to understand the causal mechanisms at play within the cross-case pattern established by QCA. This involves two related analytical orientations: understanding network activation histories – examining why and how labor movement coordination networks in each case reached their activation or latency status by the time COVID-19 arrived, treating activation status as an effect caused by prior historical conditions including critical junctures, regulatory environments, and strategic organizational orientation; and understanding activation as a cause – analyzing how each case's combination of IV1 and IV2 contributed to the

observed strike outcome, treating the conjunction of premature rollback and activation status as the proximate cause of the dependent variable and tracing the specific sequence through which grievance was or was not translated into synchronized cross-sector action.

For wave cases, the process trace establishes: (a) rollback preceded economic stabilization, generating acute grievance; (b) pre-activated coordination networks were available to translate that grievance into synchronized cross-sector action; and (c) that the resulting wave drew on the specific network infrastructure documented in the pre-pandemic activation history. For non-wave rollback cases – Ontario and British Columbia – the process trace establishes that rollback-generated grievance was present but that coordination networks were not yet operationally exercised for cross-sector mobilization at COVID onset, producing sectoral rather than cross-sector responses. These within-Canada cases are the QCA truth table's decisive rows: they hold IV1 constant at premature rollback, vary IV2, and observe the predicted difference in outcome.

Data Sources

The research draws upon a diverse range of qualitative and quantitative data sources to ensure comprehensive analysis across both process-tracing orientations and variable coding:

- News Media and Reports. National and international news coverage providing contemporaneous accounts and analyses of labor disputes, economic conditions, and policy debates.
- Legislative and Regulatory Records. Official government documents, parliamentary records, and legal texts detailing changes to labor laws, emergency

pandemic measures, and other relevant regulations. Includes back-to-work legislation, essential services designations, and labor relations board proceedings in Ontario and British Columbia; Bill 124 constitutional litigation records; and the legislative history of the 2018 Employment Relations Amendment Act in New Zealand.

- Political and Government Discourse. Speeches by political leaders, policy statements, white papers, and official government communications. Parliamentary hansard databases and government media centers are used to verify stakeholder quotes and establish official government positions on rollback timing. For each case, government statements indicating the rationale for pandemic support withdrawal are collected to support IV1 coding.
- Trade Union Reports and Public-Facing Media. Publications, press releases, organizational histories, and public communications from trade unions and labor federations in each case country. These sources support both IV2 coding – by documenting pre-pandemic cross-sector coordination activity and joint campaign infrastructure – and process-tracing for the wave period – by documenting union strategic framing, grievance articulation, and coordination activity during 2021-2024.
- Economic and Labor Market Statistics. Data on inflation, unemployment, wage growth, strike frequency, workers involved, and working days lost from national statistical offices: ABS (Australia), Statistics Canada with provincial disaggregation for Quebec, Ontario, and British Columbia (CWLD database), CSO (Ireland), Stats NZ (New Zealand), ONS (UK), and BLS (US), supplemented by the Cornell ILR Labor Action Tracker for US data. Cross-national comparability checks use ILO ILOSTAT data.

- International Organization Reports. Analyses and data from the International Labor Organization (ILO), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) providing comparative macroeconomic context for IV1 coding and cross-case comparisons of inflation trajectories and real wage performance.

VI. Case Coding

United States

DV coded as: Wave.

- Criterion 1 - Robust exceptionalism: Working days lost increased by 392% relative to the 2010-2019 decade average. The 2023 figure of 16.7 million working days lost exceeded the prior decade peak by a substantial margin. All three metrics showed higher post-pandemic averages than decade averages, and post-pandemic values exceeded prior decade peaks across multiple years and metrics. Criterion 1 is met (Cornell ILR Labor Action Tracker, 2024).
- Criterion 2 - Disjuncture from pre-pandemic trends: Although strike activity was already escalating in 2018-2019, the post-pandemic period produced a further escalation beyond that trajectory rather than a plateau, with 2023 representing a 422% increase over the 2019 peak of 3.2 million days lost. Criterion 2 is met.

IV1 coded as: Premature.

- Condition 1 - Real wages had recovered to pre-pandemic levels: At the September 6, 2021 rollback date, real wages were negative year-over-year. Condition 1 was not met.

- Condition 2 - Inflation had returned to target ranges: At the September 6, 2021 rollback date, CPI stood at 5.4% against a 2% Federal Reserve target (BLS, 2021; St. Louis Fed, 2022). Condition 2 was not met.

Neither condition had resolved at the moment of rollback. IV1 coded: Premature.

IV2 coded as: Activated.

- Condition 1 - Workers from more than one distinct world of work coordinating together: Fight for $15, launched November 2012 and sustained through the eve of the pandemic, brought together fast food workers, home care workers, airport workers, adjunct faculty, and retail employees - workers governed by different employers, different workplaces, and different regulatory frameworks including both NLRA-covered workers and those governed by the Railway Labor Act. Condition 1 is met (NELP, 2022).
- Condition 2 - Reaching for something a contract negotiation could never deliver: The campaign explicitly targeted statutory minimum wage legislation at the state and federal level, producing statutes in 29 states and nearly 60 cities by early 2020 - outcomes no employer contract could produce. Condition 2 is met (NELP, 2022).
- Condition 3 - A public political event prompting political actors outside the bargaining relationship to respond publicly: The campaign compelled presidential candidates, sitting governors, and the Obama administration to take public positions on federal minimum wage policy; California and New York passed $15 statutes following sustained public pressure. Condition 3 is met (NELP, 2022).

All three conditions are simultaneously satisfied on sustained evidence from 2012 through 2020.

United Kingdom

DV coded as: Wave.

- Criterion 1 - Robust exceptionalism: Work stoppages increased by over 1,500% relative to the prior decade average; working days lost increased by 337%. Post-pandemic peak values exceeded prior decade peaks by substantial margins across multiple metrics and multiple years. All three metrics showed higher post-pandemic averages than decade averages. Criterion 1 is met (ONS, 2023).
- Criterion 2 - Disjuncture from pre-pandemic trends: The 2022-2023 period represents the highest sustained strike activity in the UK since the early 1990s, constituting a sharp break from the historically low activity levels of 2018-2019, when the UK recorded only 79 work stoppages in 2017 - the fewest since records began in 1891. Criterion 2 is met.

IV1 coded as: Premature.

- Condition 1 - Real wages had recovered to pre-pandemic levels: At the September 30, 2021 rollback date, real wages were at their inflection point, with a sustained 20-month erosion period beginning six weeks after rollback. Condition 1 was not met.
- Condition 2 - Inflation had returned to target ranges: At the September 30, 2021 rollback date, CPI stood at approximately 3.1% and was accelerating sharply toward 9.1% by mid-2022 (ONS, 2021; Resolution Foundation, 2021). Condition 2 was not met. Neither condition had resolved at the moment of rollback.

IV2 coded as: Activated.

- Condition 1 - Workers from more than one distinct world of work coordinating together: The TUC's campaign infrastructure coordinated workers across health, education, transport, civil service, and local government - workers governed by different employers, different workplaces, and different pay review bodies under distinct legislative frameworks. Condition 1 is met (TUC Campaign Plan, 2018-19).
- Condition 2 - Reaching for something a contract negotiation could never deliver: TUC campaigns explicitly called for reversal of the public sector pay cap and an end to austerity as government policy. These desired outcomes required government policy decisions rather than any employer's signature on a contract. Condition 2 is met (TUC Campaign Plan, 2017-18).
- Condition 3 - A public political event prompting political actors outside the bargaining relationship to respond publicly: Cross-sector campaigning contributed directly to the political defeat of the public sector pay cap following the 2017 general election; a TUC-organized Parliamentary lobby in October 2017 forced explicit public governmental response. Condition 3 is met (TUC Campaign Plan, 2017-18; TUC General Council Report, 2019).

All conditions are satisfied on sustained evidence from 2011 through 2020.

Quebec

DV coded as: Wave.

- Criterion 1 - Robust exceptionalism: Quebec is the only Canadian province in which both the average and maximum values for work stoppages and working days lost from 2021-2024 exceed their counterparts from the pre-pandemic decade. Post-pandemic

values for all three metrics surpassed pre-pandemic decade peaks in multiple years. Criterion 1 is met (Statistics Canada, CWLD database).

- Criterion 2 - Disjuncture from pre-pandemic trends: The disjuncture from 2018-2019 trends is sharp and sustained; the 2022-2023 Common Front negotiation involving over 420,000 public sector workers represents a clear break from the immediately preceding trajectory. Criterion 2 is met.

IV1 coded as: Premature.

- Condition 1 - Real wages had recovered to pre-pandemic levels: At the October 23, 2021 CRB expiry date, Canadian real wages were negative year-over-year. Condition 1 was not met.
- Condition 2 - Inflation had returned to target ranges: At the October 23, 2021 CRB expiry date, Canadian CPI stood at 4.7% against a 2% Bank of Canada target. Condition 2 was not met. Federal expenditures were overwhelmingly the primary source of pandemic-induced economic aid, and all provinces had access to federal pandemic aid; Quebec, Ontario, and British Columbia all receive identical IV1 codings, which is what makes the within-Canada comparison analytically valuable as a controlled test of IV2.

IV2 coded as: Activated.

- Condition 1 - Workers from more than one distinct world of work coordinating together: In September 2019, the Lutte Commune network coordinated CEGEP teachers, rank-and-file labor activists, and ecological organizations - workers from genuinely distinct institutional domains with different employers, workplaces, and governing rules. The broader Common Front infrastructure - the CSN, FTQ, and CSQ - has coordinated

workers across education, healthcare, and social services in successive public sector bargaining rounds since the 1970s. Condition 1 is met (Labor Notes, 2019).

- Condition 2 - Reaching for something a contract negotiation could never deliver: The September 2019 action targeted government climate legislation in deliberate defiance of provincial laws explicitly prohibiting political strikes - a goal no contract negotiation could achieve, by the explicit acknowledgment of its participants. Condition 2 is met (Labor Notes, 2019).
- Condition 3 - A public political event prompting political actors outside the bargaining relationship to respond publicly: The resulting Montreal climate march drew an estimated 500,000 participants - the largest in the world that week - requiring the Legault government to respond publicly to a labor-civil society coalition taking explicit positions on climate legislation. Condition 3 is met (Labor Notes, 2019). All three conditions are simultaneously satisfied.

Ontario

DV coded as: No Wave.

- Criterion 1 - Robust exceptionalism: Ontario's post-pandemic averages and maximum values for work stoppages and working days lost do not exceed their pre-pandemic decade equivalents. Criterion 1 is not met (Statistics Canada, CWLD database).
- Criterion 2 - Disjuncture from pre-pandemic trends: No clear break from the 2018-2019 trajectory is observable in Ontario's post-pandemic strike data. Criterion 2 is not met.

IV1 coded as: Premature.

- Condition 1 - Real wages had recovered to pre-pandemic levels: At the October 23, 2021 CRB expiry date, Canadian real wages were negative year-over-year. Condition 1 was not met.
- Condition 2 - Inflation had returned to target ranges: At the October 23, 2021 CRB expiry date, Canadian CPI stood at 4.7% against a 2% Bank of Canada target (Statistics Canada, 2021). Condition 2 was not met.

IV2 coded as: Latent.

- Condition 1 - Workers from more than one distinct world of work coordinating together: Pre-pandemic coordination in Ontario was confined to the education sector. ETFO, OSSTF, and CUPE's school board workers all share the same employers (district school boards), the same workplaces (schools), and the same provincial bargaining framework. Coordination never recruited organizations from outside the education employment relationship. Condition 1 is not met (Labor Movement Coordination Evidence Inventory, 2024).
- Condition 2 - Reaching for something a contract negotiation could never deliver: The coordination targeted wages, sick days, class sizes, and working conditions - outcomes that contract negotiation can and does produce. Where a Charter challenge produced a constitutional ruling, that ruling was confined to the education bargaining framework and restructured nothing outside it. Condition 2 is not met (Labor Movement Coordination Evidence Inventory, 2024).
- Condition 3 - A public political event prompting political actors outside the bargaining relationship to respond publicly: The Ontario government responded to

education sector disputes with back-to-work legislation - a sectoral managerial response using existing institutional tools. No political actor outside the education sector was prompted to take a public position on anything beyond the immediate dispute. Condition 3 is not met (Labor Movement Coordination Evidence Inventory, 2024).

None of the three conditions are satisfied. IV2 coded: Latent.

British Columbia

DV coded as: No Wave.

- Criterion 1 - Robust exceptionalism: British Columbia's post-pandemic averages and maximum values for work stoppages and working days lost do not exceed their pre-pandemic decade equivalents. Criterion 1 is not met (Statistics Canada, CWLD database).
- Criterion 2 - Disjuncture from pre-pandemic trends: No clear break from the 2018-2019 trajectory is observable in British Columbia's post-pandemic strike data. Criterion 2 is not met.

IV1 coded as: Premature.

- Condition 1 - Real wages had recovered to pre-pandemic levels: At the October 23, 2021 CRB expiry date, Canadian real wages were negative year-over-year. Condition 1 was not met.
- Condition 2 - Inflation had returned to target ranges: At the October 23, 2021 CRB expiry date, Canadian CPI stood at 4.7% against a 2% Bank of Canada target (Statistics Canada, 2021). Condition 2 was not met.

IV2 coded as: Latent.

- Condition 1 - Workers from more than one distinct world of work coordinating together: The BCTF's 2014 dispute received financial solidarity from the BC Federation of Labour but not cross-sector organizational co-participation. A post-secondary faculty coordination body (FPSE/BC) began building cross-institutional relationships, but its own account places the formation of meaningful collaborative infrastructure during the pandemic itself, not before it. Condition 1 is not met (FPSE/BC, 2025; Labor Movement Coordination Evidence Inventory, 2024).
- Condition 2 - Reaching for something a contract negotiation could never deliver: BC's pre-pandemic labor coordination targeted class size, teacher wages, and working conditions - outcomes within the existing bargaining framework. No evidence of BCFL-coordinated campaigns targeting provincial legislation or electoral outcomes in the 2017-2019 period was identified. Condition 2 is not met (Labor Movement Coordination Evidence Inventory, 2024).
- Condition 3 - A public political event prompting political actors outside the bargaining relationship to respond publicly: No public political event of the type required was identified for BC in the pre-pandemic period. Condition 3 is not met (Labor Movement Coordination Evidence Inventory, 2024). None of the three conditions are satisfied.

Republic of Ireland

DV coded as: No Wave.

- Criterion 1 - Robust exceptionalism: All three metrics declined post-pandemic relative to decade averages. Workers involved fell by 89% and working days lost by 86%

relative to prior decade averages. Post-pandemic values did not exceed prior decade peaks. Criterion 1 is not met (CSO, 2022; CSO, 2023).

- Criterion 2 - Disjuncture from pre-pandemic trends: Ireland experienced a strike downturn rather than escalation; the post-pandemic period represents the lowest sustained strike activity in Ireland's modern industrial relations history, constituting a break downward from pre-pandemic trends rather than upward. Criterion 2 is not met in the direction required.

IV1 coded as: Premature.

- Condition 1 - Real wages had recovered to pre-pandemic levels: At the September 2021 PUP rollback date, real wages were at their turning point, with earnings growth turning sharply negative as inflation accelerated through 2022. Condition 1 was not met.
- Condition 2 - Inflation had returned to target ranges: At the September 2021 rollback date, Irish CPI stood at approximately 3.75% and was accelerating sharply toward 9.2% by mid-2022 (CSO, 2021; Central Bank of Ireland, 2022). Condition 2 was not met. Neither condition had resolved at the moment of rollback.

IV2 coded as: Latent.

- Condition 1 - Workers from more than one distinct world of work coordinating together: The most significant pre-pandemic labor action in Ireland was the 2019 nurses' strike involving the INMO and PNA. Both organizations represent nursing and midwifery workers; all coordinating parties shared the same employer (the HSE), the same workplaces (hospitals), and the same public service pay framework. The ICTU did not mobilize a cross-sector response. Condition 1 is not met (RTÉ, 2019; Murphy, 2011).

- Condition 2 - Reaching for something a contract negotiation could never deliver: The nurses' demands centered on sectoral pay parity and staffing levels, addressed through Labour Court proceedings - normal institutional tools within the existing framework. Condition 2 is not met (RTÉ, 2019).
- Condition 3 - A public political event prompting political actors outside the bargaining relationship to respond publicly: Health Minister Simon Harris responded publicly to the nurses' dispute in his capacity as the responsible sectoral minister - a sectoral managerial response, not a cross-institutional political crisis of the type the condition requires. Condition 3 is not met (RTÉ, 2019).

None of the three conditions are satisfied. Ireland's GFC experience is analytically important context: Ireland experienced the most severe GFC of any case in the study, yet produced institutional demobilization rather than network activation. The social partnership ideology that had shaped ICTU's posture since 1987 channeled the labor movement's response into concessionary bargaining rather than cross-sector mobilization - establishing that GFC severity is a permissive condition for activation, not a sufficient one, and that the pre-existing ideological configuration of the labor movement shapes whether a crisis juncture produces activated networks or deeper institutional integration (Murphy, 2011; Paolucci & Roche, 2024).

New Zealand

DV coded as: No Wave. (No post-pandemic strike wave).

- Criterion 1 - Robust exceptionalism: Workers involved more than doubled from 2010-2019 to 2021-2024, satisfying the doubling threshold. However, post-pandemic

values for other metrics do not consistently exceed prior decade peaks across multiple instances. Criterion 1 is partially met but not across all required indicators (Stats NZ, 2022).

- Criterion 2 - Disjuncture from pre-pandemic trends: Post-pandemic metrics are already in line with strike activity levels from 2018-2019 - the elevated baseline was established before the pandemic, and no meaningful escalation beyond that pre-pandemic spike is observable in the post-pandemic period. Criterion 2 is not met.

While there is an argument for the first criterion, New Zealand clearly does not meet the second criterion. While "wave" can be argued, it is decidedly not a post-pandemic wave.

IV1 coded as: Not Premature.

- Condition 1 - Real wages had recovered to pre-pandemic levels: At the November 14, 2020 expiry of the COVID-19 Income Relief Payment, the primary continuous income replacement program, real wages were modestly positive year-over-year. Condition 1 was met (Stats NZ, 2020).
- Condition 2 - Inflation had returned to target ranges: At the November 14, 2020 rollback date, CPI stood at approximately 1.4% - within the Reserve Bank of New Zealand's 1-3% target band. Condition 2 was met (Stats NZ, 2020).

Both conditions had resolved or were effectively resolved at the moment of rollback. Subsequent Delta wave subsidies in December 2021 are treated as episodic and lockdown-specific - structurally distinct from the primary income replacement program - and do not alter the primary rollback coding.

IV2 coded as: Activated.

- Condition 1 - Workers from more than one distinct world of work coordinating together: In 2018, more than 70,000 workers walked off their jobs across genuinely distinct institutional domains - nurses, teachers, midwives, and government workers in the public sector alongside bus drivers, cinema workers, fast food employees, airport engineers, and junior doctors in the private and quasi-public sectors (NZ Manufacturer, 2019; Jacobin, 2019). Condition 1 is met.
- Condition 2 - Reaching for something a contract negotiation could never deliver: The CTU's primary legislative objective entering the pandemic was the establishment of Fair Pay Agreements - sectoral bargaining legislation setting industry-wide minimum standards across all workers in a given sector regardless of union membership. That this represented genuinely new terrain rather than routine Labour policy is confirmed by the record of the Clark Labour government (1999-2008), which faced CTU pressure for sectoral bargaining and never delivered it across nine years in office (NZJER, 2020; CTU, 2019; American Progress, 2022). Condition 2 is met.
- Condition 3 - A public political event prompting political actors outside the bargaining relationship to respond publicly: Both Labour and National were forced to take public positions on the 2018-2019 strike wave and its political implications; National explicitly blamed the Labour government for raising workers' expectations, while the government itself was compelled to publicly engage with a strike wave challenging its fiscal commitments (Jacobin, 2019). Condition 3 is met.

All three conditions are simultaneously satisfied within the pre-pandemic evidentiary window. Activation evidence is moderate in strength - there is no single defining event comparable to Australia's Change the Rules federal election campaign or Quebec's September 2019 climate march - but all three conditions are met.

Australia

DV coded as: No Wave.

- Criterion 1 - Robust exceptionalism: No metric doubled from prior decade averages. Work stoppages and workers involved declined marginally in the post-pandemic period. Post-pandemic values did not surpass prior decade peaks. Criterion 1 is not met (ABS, 2023).
- Criterion 2 - Disjuncture from pre-pandemic trends: Australia maintained pre-pandemic activity levels without escalation; no break from the 2018-2019 trajectory is observable. Criterion 2 is not met.

IV1 coded as: Not Premature.

- Condition 1 - Real wages had recovered to pre-pandemic levels: At the March 28, 2021 JobKeeper expiry date, real wages were slightly positive at approximately +0.4% year-over-year. Condition 1 was met (ABS, 2021).
- Condition 2 - Inflation had returned to target ranges: At the March 28, 2021 rollback date, Australian CPI stood at approximately 1.1% - below the Reserve Bank of Australia's 2-3% target band, meaning inflationary pressure had not yet materialized. Condition 2 was met (ABS, 2021; RBA, 2021). Both conditions had resolved at the

moment of rollback. No other case in the study had even one indicator in a favorable zone at rollback; Australia had all three.

IV2 coded as: Activated.

- Condition 1 - Workers from more than one distinct world of work coordinating together: In September 2018, more than 1,700 delegates from 40 unions voted unanimously to hold an all-unions march, with workers from health, construction, education, public service, transport, and manufacturing all represented. By November 2018, 20 rallies across Australia had attracted 150,000 workers in Melbourne alone across all of these sectors. Condition 1 is met (Green Left Weekly, 2018; Peoples Dispatch, 2018).
- Condition 2 - Reaching for something a contract negotiation could never deliver: The Change the Rules campaign explicitly targeted legislative reform of the Fair Work Act 2009 - restoration of penalty rates, a living wage, an end to casual work insecurity, and overhaul of collective bargaining laws - and spent $25 million on the 2019 federal election targeting 16 specific parliamentary seats. Condition 2 is met (ACTU, 2019; ANU Press, 2020).
- Condition 3 - A public political event prompting political actors outside the bargaining relationship to respond publicly: Prime Minister Scott Morrison and his entire government were forced to respond publicly to a labor movement campaign that framed the 2019 federal election as a referendum on workers' rights, with ACTU television and radio advertising declaring "Change the Government to Change the Rules." Condition 3

is met (ACTU, 2019). All three conditions are simultaneously satisfied on sustained evidence from 2017 through 2019.

Table 2.1: Coding of Cases

Case	Premature Rollback	Networks Activated	Strike Wave
United States	Premature	Activated	Wave
United Kingdom	Premature	Activated	Wave
Quebec	Premature	Activated	Wave
Ontario	Premature	Latent	No Wave
British Columbia	Premature	Latent	No Wave
Republic of Ireland	Premature	Latent	No Wave
New Zealand	Not Premature	Activated	No Wave
Australia	Not Premature	Activated	No Wave

Table 2.1: coding of cases, as argued for in this dissertation.

The formal causal claim of this dissertation is:

Premature Rollback * Pre-Activated Coordination Networks → Strike Wave

This causal claim holds that both independent variables are jointly necessary for a proximate post-pandemic strike wave – that is, a wave whose timing and scale can be attributed directly to the conditions emerging after COVID-19. Premature rollback generates the grievance: workers experience real wage erosion, the withdrawal of income supports, and a sudden tightening of household budgets while inflation remains elevated. But grievance alone does not produce a wave. A wave requires opportunity and organizational capacity, which only pre-activated coordination networks can supply. When coordination networks are already operationally exercised before the shock, they can rapidly expand the scope of conflict, transforming isolated disputes into synchronized

cross-sector mobilization. These networks provide the infrastructure through which non-strikes become strikes, and through which early successes in unexpected sectors lend credibility to militancy, accelerating diffusion. The conjunction of acute grievance and pre-existing mobilizational capacity is therefore what produces a proximate strike wave: neither condition alone is sufficient, but together they create the conditions for rapid, coordinated escalation.

This dissertation also argues:

~Premature Rollback + ~Pre-Activated Coordination Networks → ~ Strike Wave

This causal claim holds that the absence of premature rollback and the absence of pre-activated coordination networks are each sufficient for contained industrial conflict. When either independent variable is missing, no proximate post-pandemic strike wave occurs. Without premature rollback, the grievance is not sufficiently acute to trigger widespread escalation; workers may be frustrated, but the material shock that catalyzes collective action is absent. Without pre-activated coordination networks, even substantial grievance cannot translate into synchronized cross-sector mobilization; the perceived opportunity, momentum, and organizational scaffolding required for a wave are missing.

Under these conditions, industrial conflict remains contained – but "contained" does not imply uniformity. It can take the form of a flattening of strike activity, as in British Columbia, where 2021–2024 metrics are indistinguishable from the pre-pandemic years; a moderate, non-exceptional uptick, as in Australia, where 2022 saw a brief rise far below the peaks of 2010–2019; or even a dramatic downturn, as in Ireland, where strike activity fell sharply after the pandemic. What unites these outcomes is that none exhibit

the cross-sector escalation characteristic of a strike wave. In the absence of both acute grievance and pre-existing mobilizational capacity, conflict remains bounded within sectoral or episodic channels rather than expanding into a wave.

CHAPTER 3: UNITED KINGDOM AND UNITED STATES

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, we see pronounced increases in strike activity across several liberal market economies. However, pre-existing theories do not yet fully explain the patterns of where we see post-pandemic strike waves and where such a strike wave does not materialize. This chapter compares the nearly simultaneous post-pandemic strike waves in the United States and the United Kingdom: in the United States, strikes in 2023 alone accounted for 24.9 million worker-days idle, surpassing the total from the entire previous decade; meanwhile, the United Kingdom recorded 5.05 million working days lost over the nineteen months beginning in June 2022 – the most sustained period of disruption since the late 1980s. By itself, this comparison does not fully explain the distribution of strike waves among LME's; however, this comparison does illustrate the common factors in LME's that experienced post-pandemic strike waves, while eliminating other factors as essential - particularly factors such as high union density or high structural strength.

Two labor movements with sharply unequal structural strength nonetheless produced strike waves of broadly comparable scale and systemic impact. In the United Kingdom, union density stands at 22 percent of employees – more than double the U.S. rate of 9.9 percent, itself a record low (GOV.UK 2025; BLS 2025). Public-sector density reaches 49.9 percent in the UK compared to 34 percent in the United States, and collective bargaining coverage extends to 23 percent of UK workers, while American private-sector density has collapsed to 5.9 percent (GOV.UK 2025; BLS 2025; ETUC 2020).

Institutionally, the UK labor movement is organized around a centralized peak association – the Trades Union Congress, representing 47 affiliated unions (GOV.UK 2025). By contrast, the U.S. labor movement remains fragmented across competing federation affiliates and autonomous major unions, with their combined membership concentrated almost entirely in the shrinking public sector.

The legal environment further widens these asymmetries. In the United States, right-to-work laws in numerous states allow workers to benefit from collectively bargained contracts without contributing to union finances, steadily eroding the resource base for organizing (CEPR 2025). The Supreme Court's Janus v. AFSCME (2018) decision extended this logic to the public sector, banning mandatory agency fees and undermining the financial foundation of the country's most institutionalized unions (Estlund 2021; Mackinac Center 2023). And at-will employment across most of the United States makes collective action structurally riskier than in the UK, where dismissal requires procedural justification (BLS 2025; GOV.UK 2025). Taken together, these conditions create a hostile legal environment beyond pre-existing UK parallels.

Chapters 1 and 2 offer three hypotheses competing to explain these outcomes:

- First, H1, a rollback hypothesis, argues that the economically premature withdrawal of pandemic-era income supports – in both countries occurring while consumer price inflation remained well above central bank targets and real wages were declining – created acute material grievance sufficient to generate strike activity at scale.
- Second, H2, an activation-sequencing hypothesis, accepts that premature rollback is necessary but contends it is not sufficient. Wave outcomes require a second condition:

labor-movement coordination networks must be in an operationally active state at the moment of the post-pandemic economic shock. Under this account, premature rollback coupled with latent networks produces grievance but not coordinated mobilization; the same shock transmitted through activated networks, however, produces a wave.

- Third, H3, a mobilization-capacity hypothesis, predicts proportionality: structurally stronger movements with higher density, formal coordination infrastructure, and more favorable legal-institutional resources, should generate larger and more sustained strike waves. The UK–US comparison directly tests and contradicts this claim: the structurally weaker U.S. movement nonetheless produced a wave of broadly comparable scale.

This chapter is a within-configuration comparison: specifically, the QCA truth table classifies both the United States and the United Kingdom as demonstrating both independent variables (premature rollback, pre-pandemic activation) as well as the dependent variable (post-pandemic strike wave). The chapter's task is therefore not to determine whether the activation-sequencing argument is true, but to use this within-configuration comparison to develop an equifinality model of causation: tracing the mechanisms through which each conjunction produced its wave, and analyzing how each case's distinct mechanisms shaped the character of its respective wave.

While these two cases share conjunctural conditions, they do not share common organizational channels for achieving activation. In the United Kingdom, networks were activated through formal TUC institutional machinery: synchronized ballot mandates, joint action days, and cross-sector coalition infrastructure built from 2011 onward. In the

United States, networks were activated through informal horizontal rank-and-file organizing: Labor Notes conferences, reform caucuses within established unions, and the extra-institutional tactical diffusion of the Fight for 15 and Red for Ed campaigns. While each case had activated networks at the onset of the post-pandemic shock, the pathways to activation differ, and these different pathways contributed to the different character of these waves: the UK's distributed multi-sector simultaneity and the U.S.'s concentrated mega-strikes and novel-sector unionization reflect different organizational channels through which the same activation-sequencing mechanism operated.

The chapter proceeds in four parts:

- Part I qualifies both countries as wave cases, establishes the shared basis for comparison, and states the chapter's central analytical argument.
- Part II codes both countries on IV1 (economically premature rollback) and IV2 (pre-activated coordination networks), justifying each case's truth table placement.
- Part III presents per-country wave narratives: for each country, a documentation of how the pre-pandemic activation history connects concretely to wave-period mobilization, followed by the wave arc itself.
- Part IV evaluates competing hypotheses against the comparative case evidence.

I. Wave Qualification (DV Coding)

Chapters 1 and 2 define a post-pandemic strike wave through two criteria. The first, robust exceptionalism, establishes a standard by which post-pandemic strike activity metrics must substantially exceed the 2010–19 baseline. This establishes the existence of

a strike wave. The second, trend disjuncture, requires that the post-pandemic trajectory not simply continue a trend already underway before 2020: the wave must be demonstrably discontinuous from the 2018–19 pre-pandemic trend. This establishes that the strike wave is, in fact, post-pandemic. A country is coded DV=1 only if it meets both criteria. The following subsections apply these criteria to the United States and the United Kingdom in turn.

United States

On the first criterion, the evidence is unambiguous. The Economic Policy Institute's February 2020 survey of major work stoppages shows that 2018 marked a near-35-year high in worker participation: 485,200 workers were involved in major stoppages – roughly a twentyfold increase from the 25,300 workers involved in 2017 (EPI, February 2020). The 2021–24 wave dwarfs even that resurgence. BLS data for 2023 alone record 24.9 million worker-days idle – exceeding the aggregate of the entire prior decade and surpassing the 2018 peak by more than an order of magnitude.

Thirty-three major stoppages occurred in 2023, and stoppages generating at least 1,000 idle days accounted for 96.8 percent of total strike time – 24.1 million of the 24.9 million days – indicating a wave dominated by a small number of very large, sustained actions rather than a diffuse rise in small stoppages. The UAW Stand-Up Strike against all three Detroit automakers (the first such action since 1976), the simultaneous WGA and SAG-AFTRA strikes (the first time both guilds struck together since 1960), and the Kaiser Permanente strike involving 75,000 workers formed the wave's core.

Cornell ILR's Labor Action Tracker, which captures stoppages below the BLS 1,000-worker threshold, recorded 470 work stoppages in 2023, with workers involved in major stoppages surging 280 percent from 2022 to 2023 (EPI 2024). Robust exceptionalism is established.

On the second criterion, the trajectories before and after the pandemic are decisive. The 2018–19 resurgence, while significant relative to the prior decade, was interrupted by the pandemic: work stoppages declined sharply in 2020 and 2021 as workers and unions navigated an unprecedented public-health emergency. As U.S. workers returned to workplaces – and to strikes – activity in 2022–23 exceeded 2018–19 across all standard metrics: number of disputes, workers involved, and workdays lost.

The qualitative composition of the post-pandemic wave also differs sharply from 2018–19. That earlier resurgence was overwhelmingly public-sector driven: of the 485,200 workers involved in major stoppages in 2018, approximately 457,200 were teachers and other public employees – largely Red for Ed strikers in West Virginia, Oklahoma, Arizona, and Colorado – leaving only about 28,000 private-sector workers in the nine remaining major disputes (EPI 2020; Jacobin 2019). The 2021–24 wave inverted this pattern, with private-sector workers driving the most significant actions: the UAW Stand-Up Strike, the WGA and SAG-AFTRA strikes, the Kaiser Permanente strike, and accelerating organizing across retail, logistics, higher education, nonprofits, and museums (EPI 2024). The post-pandemic wave was not only larger – it was structurally different, extending collective action into private-sector terrain that the 2018–19 resurgence had barely touched. While qualitative composition does not determine case

coding, it helps verify that post-pandemic mobilization was not merely a reversion to 2018–19 patterns. On both levels and sources of mobilization, 2022–23 remains distinct.

Before proceeding, it is necessary to address what may appear to be a contradiction at face value: this dissertation's argument that post-pandemic mobilization was a product of pre-pandemic network activation, contrasted with the assertion in this chapter that pre- and post-pandemic mobilization in the U.S. involved different sectors and different unions. This structural difference makes it reasonable to question the connection between pre-COVID coordination and post-COVID mobilization.

In the U.S., the pre-pandemic period is best understood as a build-up phase: some networks organized strike activity, but did not prioritize the private sector; meanwhile, others networks organized in the public sector, but did not prioritize strike activity. After the pandemic, both elements crossed over: public-sector strike organizers expanded into the private sector, while private-sector organizers began to prioritize strike activity. Therefore, despite the structural differences between pre- and post-pandemic mobilization, the two periods remain connected through coordination infrastructure running through two parallel tracks:

- Public-sector educator caucus networks, running from CORE's 2010 takeover of the Chicago Teachers Union through UCORE and into the Red for Ed wave.
- Private-sector reform caucus networks, running through TDU, UAWD, the Inside Organizer School, and the WGA's institutional memory from 2007–08.

Several overlapping infrastructural nodes linked these tracks, bringing together workers and organizers who were building organizational capacity before the pandemic without yet producing industrial action at scale.

United Kingdom

The UK case presents clear evidence on both criteria. On the first criterion – robust exceptionalism against the 2010–19 baseline – the threshold is met at the highest level of the scale. Hodder (2024) documents 2,518,000 striker days in 2022, the highest annual figure since 1989. Across the full wave period, June 2022–December 2023, ONS data record 5.05 million working days lost. Drawing on unions' annual Certification Officer returns, Gall (2025) identifies 2,137 instances of strike action during the wave period, dispersed across 34,424 unique workplaces. Sectoral coverage was comprehensive: transport and storage accounted for 45 percent of working days lost, education for 24 percent, health and social care for 19 percent, and public administration for 7 percent.

The February 1, 2023 joint action day involved coordination between NEU teachers, PCS civil servants, UCU university staff, ASLEF train drivers, and RMT members in the largest coordinated public-sector strike action since the late 1970s. Against the 2010–19 baseline – a period of historically depressed strike activity under legal constraints imposed by successive Conservative governments – this level of activity constitutes unambiguous exceptionalism. Robust exceptionalism is established.

On the second criterion, the UK wave is clearly a disjuncture rather than a continuation. There was no rising pre-pandemic trend to extend: the 2018–19 period was

marked by historically low aggregate strike activity, with the UCU's 2018 university pensions dispute notable precisely because it stood out against an otherwise depressed background. The wave represents a sharp break from a floor, not an acceleration of an existing trend. Trend disjuncture is established.

On this basis, the United Kingdom is coded DV=1 (wave).

Rationale for Wave Comparison

The United States and United Kingdom are selected for joint analysis because they occupy the same QCA configuration, making theirs a within-configuration comparison. This comparison is designed to answer the following questions:

- First, does the conjunction of premature rollback and pre-activated coordination networks operate through a single pathway, or can the same conjunctural logic be realized through institutionally distinct organizational channels?
- Second, if the pathways differ, does the pathway difference affect the character of the wave outcome even when the conjunctural condition is held constant?
- Third, does the comparison falsify H3 – the mobilization capacity hypothesis – on the ground that the structurally weaker case should not, under H3's logic, produce a wave of comparable scale to the structurally stronger one?

On the third question, the comparison delivers a direct answer. H3 predicts that the UK's structural advantages – double the union density, markedly higher bargaining coverage, a centralized peak association, a less hostile legal environment – should produce a substantially larger wave. And, conversely, theory predicated on labor weakness ought to predict the inverse: a wave in the U.S., but not in the U.K. The

evidence does not support either prediction. The U.S. wave generated more total strike time in a single year (2023) than the UK's entire nineteen-month wave; the UK wave involved more individual actions distributed across more workplaces; and while both waves were clearly substantial, neither wave was clearly larger than the other.

What H2 accounts for is activation state, encoded in IV2. The U.S. and UK labor movements share the property of having entered the post-pandemic period with their coordination networks in an operationally active state. In both countries, inter-organizational ties were being exercised – not merely structurally present – before the pandemic arrived. In the UK, this exercise ran through formal TUC institutional channels: coordinated ballot timing across thirty unions in 2011, sustained cross-sector coalition infrastructure through the People's Assembly Against Austerity from 2013 onward, and movement-wide adaptation to the Trade Union Act 2016 ballot thresholds that deepened rather than suppressed operational capacity. In the U.S., the exercise ran through informal horizontal networks: biennial Labor Notes conferences growing from under a thousand to over three thousand attendees by 2018, reform caucuses within established unions connecting activists across organizational boundaries, and the documented diffusion of the Fight for 15 and Red for Ed campaigns through identifiable network channels rather than institutional directives. The activation state is the same; the channel differs entirely.

This channel difference has a specific explanatory payoff: it accounts for the morphological distinction between the two waves without requiring two different causal arguments. The UK's peak-body coordination mechanism predisposes the movement

toward broad simultaneous action across sectors – the TUC can synchronize ballot mandates across affiliates representing different public-sector workforces, producing strikes that hit on the same day across education, transport, and healthcare. The U.S.'s reform-caucus and conference networks predispose the movement toward deep sector-specific mobilization – UAWD in the UAW, TDU in the Teamsters, CORE in the Chicago Teachers Union – and novel-sector penetration through trained organizers rather than peak-body direction. Both pathways produce activated networks; the networks, when engaged by the IV1 shock, produce waves shaped by the character of the coordination channel.

The within-configuration comparison thus demonstrates two things simultaneously: that activation state explains wave occurrence (not structural capacity), and that activation pathway explains wave character.

II. Coding of Independent Variables

IV1: Premature Rollback of Economic Aid

Chapters 1 and 2 define IV1 – economically premature rollback – as the withdrawal of pandemic-era income protections while consumer price inflation remains above the central bank's target rate and real wages are simultaneously declining. The baseline against which premature timing is assessed is economic stabilization: inflation returning to or approaching target, and real wages recovering to pre-pandemic levels. Both the United Kingdom and the United States are assessed against this benchmark using contemporaneous primary sources from the period of withdrawal.

United Kingdom

Rollback mechanics. The withdrawal of pandemic income supports in the United Kingdom occurred through the simultaneous removal of three support policies:

- Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS): grants to employers, capped at £2,500 per person per month, enabling employers to retain workers who could not perform their duties during pandemic restrictions (Eurofound 2020); characterized as "a novel, but temporary, state-led shift from the UK's market-orientated restructuring regime" (Dobbins and Dundon 2021)

- Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS): the self-employed equivalent of the CJRS, providing taxable grants to sole traders and partnership members whose businesses were adversely affected by COVID-19 restrictions (HM Government 2022); 2.9 million eligible self-employed individuals claimed SEISS grants, totalling £28.1 billion (HM Government 2023)

- Universal Credit (UC) Uplift: temporary £20-per-week increase to the UC standard allowance, reaching 5 million claimants – double the pre-pandemic UC caseload (IFS 2021); the uplift was withdrawn in October 2021, with critics noting that "the increase only partially reverses over a decade of benefit cuts" under prior austerity chancellors (Centre for Social Justice 2021)

Chancellor Rishi Sunak's Budget speech of March 3, 2021 announced the taper arc for the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS): government contributions would

remain at 80 percent of furloughed wages through June, fall to 70 percent in July and 60 percent in August–September, before full scheme closure on October 1, 2021 (HM Treasury, Budget Speech, 2021). The governing legal instrument for this final phase was the Seventh Treasury Direction, made on April 15, 2021 under sections 71 and 76 of the Coronavirus Act 2020, which specified the taper schedule and employer top-up obligations with statutory force (HM Treasury, Seventh Treasury Direction, 2021). Simultaneously, the fifth and final Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS) grant closed on September 30, 2021, ending self-employment support that had run in parallel with CJRS (House of Commons Library, 2021). On October 6, 2021 – six days after furlough closure – the twenty-week Universal Credit £20-per-week uplift was withdrawn (House of Commons Library, 2021). The triple withdrawal – CJRS, SEISS, and the UC uplift – landed simultaneously within a single week. At closure, the CJRS had protected 11.7 million jobs at a cost of approximately £70 billion (House of Commons Library, 2021).

Economic conditions at closure. The scheme closed into an inflationary environment that was already deteriorating. ONS CPI data show that UK consumer prices first exceeded the Bank of England's 2 percent target in May 2021 – the month before the CJRS taper began (ONS, CPI Bulletin, 2021) – and CPI stood at 3.1 percent on the date of furlough closure (ONS, CPI Bulletin, 2021). The Office for Budget Responsibility's Economic and Fiscal Outlook, published the same week as Sunak's Autumn Budget, projected CPI peaking at close to 5 percent, noting that subsequent news was "consistent with inflation peaking at close to 5 per cent" (OBR, EFO, 2021). The trajectory

vindicated the warnings: CPI reached 4.2 percent in October 2021 (ONS, CPI Bulletin, 2021), accelerated through 2022, and peaked at 11.1 percent in October 2022 – a 41-year high (ONS, CPI Bulletin, 2022). The ONS Average Weekly Earnings bulletin for August 2022 documented that real total pay fell 2.5 percent and real regular pay fell 3.0 percent for April–June 2022, describing this as "a record fall for regular pay" – the sharpest such fall since comparable records began in 2001 (ONS, AWE Bulletin, 2022). Nominal wages were not keeping pace with inflation, and real purchasing power was falling.

Government rationale. Sunak framed the withdrawal in explicitly fiscal terms. In a June 22, 2021 Commons statement, he defended the taper as "ensuring that incentives are in place to get people back to work as demand recovers" (Hansard, 2021). The Autumn Budget of October 27, 2021 – delivered against the backdrop of a 3.1 percent CPI reading that Sunak himself acknowledged – declared: "Higher borrowing today is just higher interest rates and even higher taxes tomorrow" (Hansard, 2021). The OBR's Economic and Fiscal Outlook structured the Budget's macro rationale around fiscal consolidation as the overriding policy priority throughout (OBR, EFO, 2021).

Contemporaneous contestation. The argument that the timing was premature was made in real time by major unions, think tanks, and opposition politicians. TUC General Secretary Frances O'Grady warned on July 1, 2021: "Ministers must not pull the plug on our recovery by cutting off support too soon" (TUC, 2021). On September 30, 2021 – the final day of the scheme – Torsten Bell of the Resolution Foundation stated that "the government wrongly tried to bring furlough to a premature end," noting that approximately one million workers were still on the scheme at closure (Resolution

Foundation, 2021). Gary Smith, GMB General Secretary, warned on September 9, 2021 of "an economic cliff-edge which risks killing the recovery before it even starts," citing the aviation sector where 51 percent of workers were still furloughed in July (GMB, 2021). IPPR economists identified a "hidden jobs gap of up to 2.1 million" at closure and called for extending the scheme until the economy surpassed its pre-pandemic output level (IPPR, September 2021). In the Commons Budget debate of October 27, 2021, Shadow Chancellor Rachel Reeves directly named "the premature ending of furlough, and, worst of all, that disgraceful £1,000 cut in universal credit" as defining failures of the government's economic management (Hansard, 2021).

Coding. The timing of pandemic income-support withdrawal in the United Kingdom is coded premature (IV1=1). Supports were withdrawn while CPI was running at 3.1 percent – 55 percent above the Bank of England's 2 percent target – and while real wages were already declining. The ONS subsequently documented the sharpest fall in real regular pay since comparable records began. The triple simultaneous closure of CJRS, SEISS, and the UC uplift in a single week, against a backdrop of accelerating inflation the OBR itself had forecast would approach 5 percent, constitutes premature withdrawal by Chapter I's operational definition.

United States

Rollback mechanics. Pandemic unemployment insurance in the United States rolled back in two distinct phases: state-level early-termination wave in May-July 2021, and a federal-level universal expiration on September 6, 2021.

State level: the state-level wave was triggered by the April 2021 BLS Employment Situation report, released May 7, which showed only 266,000 jobs added versus roughly one million expected – a widely cited miss that Republican governors used as evidence that enhanced benefits were discouraging work (BLS, Employment Situation, 2021). Montana Governor Greg Gianforte announced the first early termination on May 4, 2021, ahead of the jobs report, declaring that "the vast expansion of federal unemployment benefits is now doing more harm than good" and launching a $1,200 Return-to-Work Bonus Initiative (NBC Montana, 2021). Over the following eleven weeks, 26 states followed. Governor Greg Abbott (Texas): "It is time for America to get back to work." Governor Kim Reynolds (Iowa): "These payments are discouraging people from returning to work." Governor Brad Little (Idaho): "We do not want people on unemployment. We want people working." Effective termination dates compressed from June 12 – the first four states (Alaska, Iowa, Mississippi, Missouri) – through late July, with the bulk of states terminating between June 19 and June 27. By July, roughly 3.5 million workers in early-termination states lost enhanced benefits.

Federal level: the American Rescue Plan Act (H.R. 1319), signed March 11, 2021, extended the $300/week FPUC supplement through weeks ending on or before September 6, 2021. On August 19, 2021, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and Labor Secretary Marty Walsh issued a letter to Congress confirming the expiration would proceed as planned: "The boost was always intended to be temporary and it is appropriate for that benefit boost to expire" (Yellen-Walsh, 2021). President Biden had signaled support for the expiration on June 4, stating: "That temporary boost is going to expire in

90 days. That makes sense" (Biden, 2021). On September 6, 2021, all three enhanced programs expired simultaneously – FPUC, PUA (covering gig workers and the self-employed), and PEUC extended benefits – leaving approximately 7.5 million workers with no benefits on a single day.

Economic conditions at expiration. BLS CPI data show the federal expiration occurred in a deteriorating inflationary environment. CPI stood at 5.0 percent in May 2021, when Montana announced the first state termination – already the highest reading since August 2008, and 150 percent above the Federal Reserve's 2 percent target (BLS, CPI, 2021). CPI stood at 5.4 percent through June and July, as the bulk of state terminations took effect (BLS, CPI, 2021). The definitive quantification of the premature timing was provided by Coombs, Dube, et al. (2021), using anonymized bank-transaction data for 16,253 individuals in early-termination states: average cumulative UI benefits fell $2,529 while average cumulative earnings increased by only $292 – a net income loss of $2,237 per affected worker – confirming that economic conditions sufficient for safe withdrawal were not present (Coombs, Dube, et al., 2021). CPI later peaked at 9.1 percent in June 2022; BLS Real Earnings releases documented declining real average hourly earnings throughout the intervening period.

Government rationale. The labor-market participation frame was deployed consistently at both state and federal levels. Governors framed the withdrawal as removing a disincentive to employment – a "paying people not to work" argument – while the Biden administration framed the September expiration as the planned and appropriate end of a temporary supplement. The White House offered states the option of

using American Rescue Plan fiscal-relief funds to continue assistance but did not extend the programs; internal White House divisions on this decision were reported by the Washington Post on September 3, 2021 (Washington Post, 2021).

Contemporaneous contestation. The Economic Policy Institute directly rebutted the governors of the 26 early-termination states: "Claims that the federal UI programs are preventing businesses from finding staff are unsubstantiated by the evidence," noting that employment in early-termination states was still down an average of 3.5 percent from February 2020 (EPI, Shierholz and Bivens, 2021). The AFL-CIO wrote to the Senate: "The claim that the FPUC is causing worker shortages is simply not true" (AFL-CIO Senate Letter, 2021). The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities warned as early as February 2021 that an August cut-off date was "very problematic," recommending benefits be tied to economic conditions rather than arbitrary calendar dates (CBPP, 2021). The National Employment Law Project reported that over 46 percent of UI recipients in early-termination states were people of color (NELP, cited NPR, 2021). Legal challenges were filed in Indiana and Maryland: Marion Superior Court Judge John Hanley found a preponderance of evidence that Indiana's early termination violated state unemployment law, reinstating benefits until the federal September expiration (Indiana Legal Services, complaint, 2021). A Maryland state judge issued a parallel preliminary injunction. Together, the two rulings reinstated benefits for approximately 500,000 workers.

Coding statement. The timing of pandemic income-support withdrawal in the United States is coded premature (IV1=1). State-level terminations began when CPI was running at 5.0 percent – 150 percent above the Federal Reserve's 2 percent target – and

the federal expiration affected 7.5 million workers simultaneously in an identical inflationary environment. The Coombs-Dube study provides definitive quantification: workers in early-termination states lost $2,529 in benefits and gained only $292 in earnings, confirming that the economic-stabilization conditions required for safe withdrawal – real wages recovering, inflation approaching target – were not present.

IV2: Pre-Pandemic Activation of Labor Movement Coordination Networks

All evidence assessed in this section predates March 2020. This cutoff is an analytical requirement: if the argument is that activation led to mobilization, but the evidence for activation runs concurrent with the evidence for mobilization, then the argument becomes circular and tautological. IV2 must therefore code the state of coordination networks at the onset of the post-pandemic shock. Evidence generated during or after the pandemic cannot establish that networks were activated before the shock arrived; it can only describe what happened afterward. No source cited in this section falls within or after March 2020.

Both the United Kingdom and the United States are coded as critical-juncture activated: their coordination networks were not continuously active from the outset, but underwent activation during a prior crisis – the Global Financial Crisis and its austerity aftermath – and remained operationally exercised through to the pandemic onset. The activation pathways are institutionally distinct. UK activation ran through formal TUC machinery – synchronized ballot mandates, joint action days, and peak-body coalition infrastructure. US activation ran through informal horizontal rank-and-file networks – Labor Notes conferences, reform caucuses within established unions, and the

extra-institutional tactical diffusion of the Fight for 15 and Red for Ed campaigns. This pathway difference is not incidental: it is the variable that explains the subsequent morphological distinction between the two waves.

Previous chapters have specified three conditions for IV2:

- Workers from more than one distinct world of work must act together under shared coordination infrastructure.
- Their shared demands must grow to exceed the scope of a contract negotiation alone.
- Their coordinated action must generate a public political event that prompts a public response from political actors outside the bargaining relationship.

All three conditions must apply concurrently. The following subsections apply this test to each country.

United Kingdom

Critical juncture and forcing mechanism. The Global Financial Crisis-austerity onset of 2010 is the UK's critical juncture. The Coalition government's June 2010 emergency Budget announced £81 billion in spending cuts and £29 billion in tax increases by 2014–15, with local government budgets cut 27 percent in real terms and nine government departments facing reductions exceeding 20 percent (Hills and Stewart 2016; CLES 2015). Public-sector pension reforms proposed in March 2011 – increasing contribution rates, shifting from final-salary to career-average calculations, and raising retirement ages – directly threatened the deferred wages of millions of union members

across health, education, civil service, and local government simultaneously (Eurofound 2012). The forcing mechanism was cross-sectoral: the reforms covered workers governed by different employers, pay review bodies, and legislative frameworks, creating a resistance imperative no single union could meet. The Coalition's austerity program thus compelled the TUC to operationalize its coordination function at scale for the first time in a generation. Eurofound's contemporaneous institutional documentation of the N30 action confirms that the TUC coordinated strike-ballot timing across unions, delegated organizing responsibility and budgets across regions, and served as interlocutor with government through the TUC Public Services Liaison Group – comprising leaders of twenty-four affiliated unions – precisely because it was the only institution with the organizational reach to coordinate action straddling health, education, transport, and the civil service simultaneously (Eurofound 2012).

Activation marker. On November 30, 2011 – N30 – thirty trade unions coordinated a 24-hour public-sector strike under the TUC banner. Eurofound documented "a coordinated 24-hour strike involving members of 30 trade unions," identifying the TUC's specific operational role: coordinating strike-ballot timing across unions, delegating organizing responsibility and budgets to different unions in different regions, and serving as interlocutor through the TUC Public Sector Liaison Group (Eurofound, 2012). Kimber reported contemporaneously that "this level of coordination across the trade union movement was quite unprecedented" (Kimber, 2012). Approximately 997,000 working days were lost on a single day – the largest coordinated public-sector

action since 1926. This is the moment of activation: the TUC moved from structural existence to operational exercise.

The coordination infrastructure built around N30 did not lapse after 2011. In June 2013, the People's Assembly Against Austerity was founded at Westminster Central Hall with over 4,000 attendees, bringing together trade unions, community campaigns, and political actors under a shared cross-sector mobilizational banner. The founding letter explicitly called for "coordinated industrial action" synchronized across the movement, establishing the People's Assembly not as a political campaign but as standing mobilizational infrastructure (People's Assembly, founding letter, 2013; People's Assembly, founding conference, 2013). A three-year study based on 2013–2015 fieldwork documented how the Assembly "created and sustained a heterogeneous coalition through a policy of nonpartisanship and a consensus-driven decentralised network of grassroots local assemblies orchestrated by a national organisation" (Geelan 2022). The Assembly remained operational through the pre-pandemic period, maintaining the cross-sector coalition infrastructure the TUC had first activated in 2011.

The passage of the Trade Union Act 2016 – which imposed 50 percent turnout thresholds on strike ballots and introduced new procedural requirements – created the conditions for a further deepening of coordination capacity rather than its suppression. The TUC organized a movement-wide Get the Vote Out campaign across affiliated unions, a coordinated response to hostile legislation that the TUC General Council Report 2017 documents as winning "Best Public Affairs Campaign" at the PR Week Awards in October 2016 (TUC General Council Report, Congress 2017). Lyddon's analysis of

Certification Officer data for 2017–2019 found that "unions have, generally, mobilised successfully to 'get the vote out'" – the government had predicted 29–35 percent of ballots would fail under the new thresholds; the actual failure rate was roughly half that (Lyddon 2021). Hostile legislation drove the movement toward more sophisticated coordination, not away from it.

In February and March 2018, the University and College Union struck at 61 universities across the UK for fourteen days over proposed changes to the USS pension scheme, achieving an 88 percent yes vote on a 58 percent national turnout – the strongest result in a national UCU ballot since the union's formation in 2006 (UCL UCU Branch, USS Pension Dispute Timeline). The National Union of Students issued a formal cross-organizational solidarity statement calling on members to "participate in local demonstrative solidarity action during the strikes in support of UCU members" (UCU-NUS Joint Statement, 2018). UCU adopted disaggregated balloting – running separate ballots by institution to meet Trade Union Act thresholds – as a coordination strategy that spread across the movement. The TUC Campaign Plan 2018–19 explicitly references the UCU strikes as catalyzing new union membership and describes cross-union local collaboration as standing practice. The TUC General Council Report 2018 documents cross-sectoral coordination infrastructure and the movement-wide response to Trade Union Act implementation continuing through that period (TUC General Council Report, Congress 2018).

Condition 1 – Participant stakeholders beyond one distinct world of work. N30 coordinated health workers (UNISON, Unite), education workers (NUT, ATL, UCU),

civil servants (PCS), and local-government workers – actors with distinct employers, workplaces, and legislative frameworks. The People's Assembly sustained this cross-sector coalition continuously from 2013. The UCU 2018 strikes drew formal solidarity from NUS across organizational boundaries. The TUC Campaign Plan 2018–19 confirms that cross-sector coordination across these workforce categories continued as standing practice through the end of the pre-pandemic period. Condition 1 is met.

Condition 2 – Goals expand beyond the scope of a contract negotiation. TUC campaigns explicitly called for reversing the public-sector pay cap and ending austerity as government policy – outcomes requiring legislative or executive action, not an employer's signature on a collective agreement. The People's Assembly's founding letter called for action against "cuts and privatisation" as policy, not employer-level bargaining demands. TUC Campaign Plans 2017–18 and 2018–19 document this as the explicit programmatic framing of the movement's cross-sector mobilization. Condition 2 is met.

Condition 3 – A public political event prompting political actors outside the bargaining relationship to respond publicly. The TUC-organized Parliamentary lobby of October 2017 generated explicit governmental response to cross-sector campaigning against the public-sector pay cap. The subsequent political defeat of the cap – the Conservative government's 2017 announcement that it would lift the 1 percent cap following the general-election result – constitutes the most direct political response to coordinated cross-sector pressure documented in the record. The TUC General Council Report 2019 confirms that movement-wide campaigns had "put public services, pay cuts

and job quality centre-stage" in the preceding electoral period (TUC General Council Report, Congress 2019). Condition 3 is met.

All three conditions are satisfied on sustained evidence from 2011 throughout the 2010s, running through N30, the People's Assembly, the Trade Union Act GTVO campaigns, and the UCU 2018 strikes. The United Kingdom is coded IV2=1 (activated).

United States

Critical juncture and forcing mechanism. The GFC of 2008–09 is the U.S. critical juncture. The forcing mechanism is distinct from the UK's and must be named explicitly, because it explains why U.S. activation ran through informal horizontal networks rather than formal peak-body machinery: nationally coordinated employer opposition at scale. Amazon, Walmart, McDonald's, and Starbucks deployed centralized anti-union strategies that operated across local and sectoral boundaries, making piecemeal, union-by-union responses inadequate. The coordinating response was reactive and bottom-up: extra-institutional networks had to be built because the AFL-CIO's peak-body infrastructure was not positioned to run the kind of multi-sector, non-collective-bargaining campaign the environment required. U.S. activation was driven by the forcing function of a hostile employer class organizing nationally, not by a government austerity programme channeled through existing peak-body structures.

Activation marker. On November 29, 2012, approximately 200 New York City fast-food workers struck demanding $15/hour and union rights. The campaign was organized by a multi-organizational coalition – New York Communities for Change, SEIU, UnitedNY, and the Black Institute – representing workers from McDonald's,

Burger King, Wendy's, Domino's, and other chains simultaneously (CNN, 2012; Waging Nonviolence, 2012). SEIU's investigative reporting confirmed a comprehensive national plan spanning fast food, airport, child care, and home care workers – a multi-sector extra-institutional coordination structure built from the outset (Gupta, In These Times, 2013). This is the moment of activation: the launch of a cross-sector campaign that would operate outside traditional collective-bargaining frameworks and grow into a national political force.

The coordination infrastructure built around this activation did not remain confined to a single campaign. Several overlapping networks were simultaneously developing organizational capacity across the pre-pandemic decade, each bringing together workers and organizers who would go on to lead the post-pandemic wave. Labor Notes conferences served as recurring cross-sector convergence points for public- and private-sector activists alike, growing from under 1,000 attendees before 2012 to 3,000 at the 2018 conference – which took place at the peak of the Red for Ed wave, with West Virginia teachers headlining alongside transit workers, longshore caucuses, nurses, and autoworker reformers building their own networks in the same space (DiMaggio and Furman 2018). UCORE, the cross-union educator caucus network anchored by Labor Notes, held twice-monthly coordination calls for over a decade before the pandemic, which its organizers described as "an anchor for the rest of the working class" (Friedman 2026). Teamsters for a Democratic Union formed the UPS Teamsters United network in 2018 around logistics contract campaigns – a private-sector coordination structure explicitly organized before the pandemic that would be put into strike action in 2023

(TDU 2023). Unite All Workers for Democracy was founded in 2019, citing TDU's model and Labor Notes infrastructure, building the reform coalition within UAW that would design the Stand-Up Strike (Slaughter 2023). United Electrical Workers, drawing on decades of rank-and-file infrastructure, founded the Emergency Workplace Organizing Committee with DSA's labor commission and former Sanders campaign organizers in March 2020; by 2022, they had initiated nearly 400 organizing campaigns in sectors outside traditional union reach (The Forge 2020; Chauhan et al. 2024).

Condition 1 – Workers from more than one distinct world of work. By December 4, 2014, fast-food workers in 190 cities were joined by caregivers, airport workers, home-care workers, and employees at discount and convenience stores. By the April 15, 2015 national day of action, 60,000 workers participated across 200 cities, with support actions in 35 countries. The campaign united workers governed by different employers, different workplace regulatory frameworks – including both NLRA-covered workers and those governed by the Railway Labor Act – and entirely distinct industries (NELP 2022; Nation 2016). Labor Notes conferences simultaneously brought together educators, transit workers, healthcare workers, longshore workers, and manufacturing reform caucuses under shared infrastructure (DiMaggio and Furman 2018). Condition 1 is met.

Condition 2 – Goals grow beyond the scope of a contract negotiation alone. The Fight for $15 campaign targeted statutory minimum-wage legislation at the state and federal level. By early 2020, the campaign had produced minimum-wage statutes in 29 states and nearly 60 cities – outcomes no employer-level contract negotiation could produce (NELP 2022). SEIU President Mary Kay Henry stated in 2015: "This movement

is changing our political debate…making cities and states raise minimum wages" – articulating a campaign demand that is explicitly legislative, not contractual.

Condition 3 – A public political event prompting political actors outside the bargaining relationship to respond publicly. The campaign compelled presidential candidates, sitting governors, and the Obama administration to take public positions on federal minimum-wage policy. California's $15 statute (2016) and New York's $15 statute (2016) both followed sustained Fight for $15 public-pressure campaigns – the most direct legislative responses to coordinated extra-institutional labor pressure in the pre-pandemic record (NELP 2022). Condition 3 is met.

All three conditions are simultaneously satisfied on sustained evidence from 2012 through 2020, running through the Fight for $15 campaign, Labor Notes conference infrastructure, UCORE, TDU's UPS Teamsters United network, UAWD, and the organizational foundations from which EWOC would emerge at the pandemic's onset. The United States is coded IV2=1 (activated).

Shared Activation State, Distinct Activation Pathways

The United Kingdom and the United States are both coded IV2=1 (activated), but they reached this activation state through fundamentally different organizational pathways shaped by their respective critical junctures and forcing mechanisms. In the UK, activation was driven by the GFC-austerity shock of 2010, which compelled the TUC to operationalize its peak-body coordination machinery at scale for the first time in a generation. The forcing mechanism was cross-sectoral government policy – pension reforms and austerity measures that simultaneously threatened workers across health,

education, civil service, and local government. This produced a top-down, institutionally anchored activation pathway: synchronized ballot mandates, joint action days, and standing cross-sector coalition infrastructure extending from N30 (2011) through the People's Assembly (2013–2020), the Trade Union Act GTVO campaigns (2016–2019), and the UCU USS strikes (2018).

In the U.S., activation emerged from GFC conditions, but arose from the employer-driven aftermath of the crisis rather than from government austerity. The forcing mechanism was nationally coordinated employer opposition (e.g. Amazon, Walmart, McDonald's, Starbucks) deploying centralized anti-union strategies that cut across local and sectoral boundaries. Because the AFL-CIO's peak-body structure was not positioned to run a multi-sector, non-collective-bargaining campaign, activation developed through informal horizontal rank-and-file networks. The moment of activation was the November 29, 2012 New York fast-food strike – the launch of the Fight for $15, a cross-sector extra-institutional campaign built from the outset to operate outside traditional bargaining frameworks. Over the following decade, overlapping networks – Labor Notes, UCORE, TDU's UPS Teamsters United, UAWD, and the organizational foundations from which EWOC emerged – continuously exercised coordination capacity across sectors and industries. Thus, while both countries entered the pandemic with active coordination networks, the organizational channels through which activation occurred were entirely different. The UK's pathway was peak-body institutional, rooted in formal TUC machinery and cross-sector coalition structures. The U.S. pathway was

extra-institutional and horizontal, rooted in rank-and-file networks, reform caucuses, and multi-sector campaigns targeting statutory change rather than employer-level bargaining.

This distinction is central to the equifinality argument. The activation state (IV2=1) explains why both countries produced waves despite stark differences in structural strength. The activation pathway explains why the waves looked different: the UK's distributed, multi-sector simultaneity reflects peak-body coordination capacity, while the U.S.'s concentrated mega-strikes and novel-sector breakthroughs reflect the depth and sector-specific density of horizontal reform networks. The comparison thus demonstrates that the same conjunctural condition – premature rollback meeting activated networks – can be realized through institutionally distinct channels, and that these channels shape the morphology of the wave without altering its occurrence.

III. Case Narratives

How Pre-Pandemic Infrastructure Became the United Kingdom's Wave Channel

The United Kingdom's 2022–23 strike wave did not emerge from unions that had been dormant and were suddenly awoken by inflation. It emerged from a coordination infrastructure that had been built, exercised at scale, and kept operationally alive across the entire 2010–19 austerity period. The mechanism through which the pre-pandemic network became the wave channel operated at two levels simultaneously: named individuals carrying specific organizational experience from one period directly into leadership of the other, and formal TUC machinery activating its existing coordination function rather than constructing a new one.

Personnel continuity. Six bridging figures account for the organizational continuity between the N30 generation and the 2022–23 wave, and their trajectories are documented precisely. Frances O'Grady joined TUC staff in 1994, founded the TUC Organizing Academy in 1997, and served as Deputy General Secretary throughout the austerity decade before becoming General Secretary in January 2013 (TUC 2022a; TUC biography, Paul Nowak). Her October 2022 Congress speech – "People ask me: will the TUC coordinate strike action this winter? And I say: We already are" – was not a policy announcement but a statement of present fact (O'Grady, TUC Congress speech, 2022). Her successor, Paul Nowak, was a member of the inaugural Organising Academy cohort in 1997 (alongside Sharon Graham, later Unite General Secretary, and Roz Foyer, later STUC General Secretary), served as O'Grady's Deputy throughout the 2010s, and took over as General Secretary on 29 December 2022 (TUC biography, Paul Nowak). The TUC biography records him as having "worked closely with member unions to defend public sector pensions" – a direct reference to the N30 period (TUC biography, Paul Nowak). In his first LabourList interview as General Secretary, Nowak made the coordination function explicit: "That's the role of the TUC. To coordinate unions and make sure that we are talking to each other and that we're not cutting across each other or undermining each other's campaigns" (Nowak, LabourList, 29 December 2022).

Mark Serwotka served as PCS General Secretary from 2000 through late 2023, bridging both periods in their entirety. He had signed the People's Assembly founding letter in 2013 alongside Bob Crow and Len McCluskey, played a leading role in both the June 2011 and N30 strikes, and led the 2022–23 PCS civil service campaign (133,000

members, 86.2% yes vote – the highest in PCS history) (Serwotka, Left Foot Forward, 2022). In a 2022 interview, he explicitly connected the periods: “When history is written, the trade union movement will have been seen to have failed in fighting austerity, and we have to learn that lesson” (Serwotka, Left Foot Forward, 2022). This framing positions the 2022–23 campaign as a corrective application of the N30 generation’s accumulated lessons, not a fresh start. Christina McAnea, who became UNISON General Secretary in January 2021, had been the union’s head of health during the 2011 pensions dispute, serving as lead negotiator in the first national health strike in England in twenty-five years in 2014 (UNISON 2021). Her November 2022 blog was unambiguous: “We’ve been here before – the first round was painful, damaging and lasted over a decade” (McAnea, UNISON blog, November 2022).

Mary Bousted had led ATL through its first national strike in over a century on 30 June 2011 and the N30 strike alongside twenty other unions; Kevin Courtney had been NUT Deputy General Secretary from 2010, becoming General Secretary in 2016 and NEU Joint General Secretary at the 2017 merger (NEU press release, 2023). Together they led the 2023 teacher strikes – 90% yes votes, 23,400 schools affected – with their January 2023 statement explicitly framing the action as correcting the same real-terms decline that had begun in 2010 (NEU press release, January 2023). Mick Lynch had joined RMT in 1993, served two terms on the National Executive Committee from 2003, and served two terms as Assistant General Secretary under Bob Crow and Mick Cash during the 2010s before his election as General Secretary in May 2021 (RMT; Sky News 2022). Pat Cullen had led the first-ever RCN strike action in Northern Ireland in 2019 –

explicitly described at the time as “a test case for potential national industrial action” – before leading the December 2022 national strikes (Irish Times, 2022).

Structural continuity. The TUC Congress 2022 Composite Motion C18, Rebuilding Industrial Power, unanimously passed and moved by UNISON, seconded by POA, supported by BFAWU, Unite, and PCS, provided the formal mandate: the TUC General Council was “to actively encourage, facilitate, organise, support industrial coordination and a united campaign of coordinated industrial action between unions including convening a working group of unions in the public and private sectors to plan and coordinate action on pay and jobs” (TUC Congress 2022, Composite Motion C18). This was not a new authorization – it formalized a function the TUC had exercised since 2011 – but it created explicit democratic accountability for the coordination machinery the TUC then deployed during the wave. The TUC Solidarity Hub, created during the wave’s opening months, formalized the intelligence-sharing infrastructure: a dispute database tracking over 1,000 industrial disputes across 34 unions, fed by regional offices and the national TUC staff (TUC General Council Report 2022; TUC Solidarity Hub). The 2023 General Council Report documented two movement-wide roundtables on coordinating industrial campaigns and a TUC-coordinated legal challenge by 11 unions to agency strike-breaking regulations (TUC General Council Report 2023).

The February 1, 2023 joint action day – 500,000 workers from UCU, NEU, PCS, ASLEF, and RMT walking out simultaneously – was not a general strike. It was the N30 mechanism replicated precisely. As academic analysis of N30 confirmed: “The TUC did not call N30, instead it coordinated action that the TUC’s public service unions

themselves had decided to take." The RMT's own announcement for February 1 stated that the date "coincides with a TUC day of action where several unions are co-ordinating their strikes during the cost of living crisis" (RMT announcement, 2023). The mechanism was identical: TUC synchronizes the date; individual unions ballot and call their own actions; formal legal independence is maintained while coordination effect is maximized. The People's Assembly Against Austerity, founded June 2013, remained fully operational under National Secretary Laura Pidcock, organizing the November 5, 2022 national demonstration where Mick Lynch spoke and RMT strikers led the march (People's Assembly 2023). The structural infrastructure that had been built to resist austerity in the 2010s was deployed without modification to channel the cost-of-living wave in 2022–23.

Timeline of the Wave: June 2022 Mobilization. The strike wave began on 21, 23, and 25 June 2022, when over 40,000 RMT members at Network Rail and 13 train operators walked out in what Reuters characterized as "the UK's biggest rail strike in 30 years" (Reuters 2022a). The ballot result – 89% yes on 71% turnout, easily exceeding the Trade Union Act 2016's thresholds – had itself been a signal (Sky News 2022). The effective renationalization of rail services during the pandemic had concentrated the dispute at the Department for Transport and Treasury, transforming a fragmented multi-employer negotiation into a direct confrontation with government pay policy. Network Rail was simultaneously proposing to cut 2,500 maintenance jobs; the RMT's demands – an 11% pay rise matching inflation, job protection – were therefore compounded grievances about both pay erosion and structural threat (Sky News 2022). General

Secretary Mick Lynch became the wave's most visible public figure, consistently framing the dispute in class terms that cut through the usual media framing of strikes as selfish obstruction. The government's response – Transport Secretary Grant Shapps accused the RMT of "jumping the gun," Prime Minister Sunak insisted the demands were "unreasonable and unaffordable" – failed to break the strike or shift public opinion against the workers (Sky News 2022). Polling throughout summer and autumn 2022 showed consistent majority public support. The RMT maintained intermittent strike action through the summer and autumn, establishing two precedents that would prove catalytic for other sectors: first, that the Trade Union Act's thresholds could be met and exceeded; second, that a sustained campaign against government pay policy would not automatically generate a public opinion backlash.

Healthcare sector mobilization: October–December 2022. The Royal College of Nursing launched a strike ballot in October 2022, announcing in November that members had voted by 89% to strike – the RCN's first industrial action in its 106-year history (BBC 2022; RCN 2022). The union cited cumulative real-terms pay decline of approximately 20% since 2010, compounded by pandemic-era workload intensification (RCN 2022; Lancet 2023). The demonstration effect of the RMT campaign operated through three logics: it showed that statutory ballot thresholds were achievable; it showed that government intransigence to RMT demands signaled other unions would face similar resistance; and it normalized strikes as legitimate after decades of relative quiescence. On 15 and 20 December 2022, RCN members staged the largest nursing strikes in NHS history, with tens of thousands walking out across England, Wales, and Northern Ireland

(BBC 2022; RCN 2022). Pat Cullen's framing was existential: "We strike for the future of the NHS" (RCN 2022). Ambulance workers from Unite and GMB coordinated action on subsequent dates, compounding healthcare disruption and demonstrating cross-union solidarity that had been absent in public sector disputes since the N30 period. December 2022 recorded 843,000 working days lost – the highest single month since November 2011 (Reuters 2022b; Yahoo Finance 2024).

Multi-sector eruption: January–February 2023. On 16 January 2023, the NEU announced that its members had voted overwhelmingly for strike action, citing a "toxic mix of low pay and excessive workload" that was driving teachers from the profession (Sky News 2023a). The announcement scheduled the first national teacher strike for February 1. Simultaneously, PCS announced that 100,000 civil servants would strike on the same date (Civil Service World 2023). Mark Serwotka explicitly linked the action to broader momentum, characterizing it as a necessary mobilization against government attacks on public sector workers' living standards and the right to strike itself (Serwotka, Tribune, September 2023). ASLEF train drivers also struck on February 1 and 3. The concentration of action on a single date – coordinated through the TUC's C18 mechanism – produced what media coverage termed a "mega strike": approximately 500,000 workers from transport, education, civil service, and higher education walking out simultaneously (TUC General Council Report 2023). The ONS later documented that between June 2022 and February 2023 alone, 2.5 million working days had been lost (ONS 2023). The February 1 peak represented the highest concentration of coordinated public sector action since 1926 and embodied the TUC infrastructure's primary comparative advantage: not

the capacity to call a general strike, but the capacity to synchronize ballot mandates and action dates across dispersed sectors to generate simultaneous pressure on a single political decision-maker.

Tactical innovation and junior doctors: March–December 2023. In March 2023, junior doctors represented by the British Medical Association voted to strike, initiating what would become the longest and most disruptive healthcare dispute of the entire wave. The Nuffield Trust provided the material context: approximately 69,000 junior doctors, pay declined approximately 26% in real terms since 2008 (Nuffield Trust 2023). When the RCN faced a High Court challenge to its strike mandate in April 2023 – the court ruling its ballot technically invalid due to procedural irregularities – UCU pioneered a tactical innovation that would come to define the later phase of the wave: the marking and assessment boycott. Rather than withdrawing labor through strikes requiring fresh ballots every six months, UCU members refused to mark student assessments or submit grades. Beginning in April and extending through the summer, the boycott left thousands of students unable to graduate or progress (Wonkhe 2023). Sky News in May reported that "university students are in limbo due to marking boycott" – a disruption that imposed substantial costs while circumventing the Trade Union Act's ballot requirements (Sky News 2023b). The boycott demonstrated the UCU's organizational capacity while also revealing the limits of alternative tactics: it eventually collapsed without comprehensive victory on workload or pensions, as employer adaptation and member fatigue eroded its effectiveness. The junior doctors' campaign escalated through 2023 as other sectors settled. On 20 December 2023, the BMA announced a six-day walkout

spanning the Christmas period – its longest action – framing it as existential: the NHS faced a workforce crisis that only full pay restoration could address (Sky News 2023c).

Settlement arc. Teachers accepted a 6.5% rise in July 2023 – the first major settlement, reflecting a strategic decision that the settlement, while below inflation, represented the largest increase in over a decade and would prevent school staffing cuts (BBC 2023). Network Rail RMT members accepted 9.2% over two years in November 2023, bringing one strand of the rail dispute to resolution while train operating company members continued striking (Sky News 2023d). The fundamental political change came with the Labour government's election on 4 July 2024. Health Secretary Wes Streeting presented a 22.3% increase over two years to the BMA on 29 July; 66% of junior doctor members voted to accept in September 2024, ending a dispute that had run for eighteen months (The Guardian 2024; The Independent 2024). Reuters reported that the RMT accepted a pay deal resolving the train operating company disputes on 25 September 2024, unifying the settlement position after the earlier Network Rail split (Reuters 2024).

The wave's structural shape, as registered in the aggregate statistics, reflects the TUC's structural comparative advantage. The June 2022–December 2023 period produced 5.05 million working days lost – approaching the 5.34 million days lost between July 1989 and January 1991 and representing the highest concentration for any comparable interval in over three decades (Yahoo Finance 2024). Strike activity dispersed across 34,424 unique workplaces in 2022 alone, with days lost distributed across transport and storage (45%), education (24%), health and social care (19%), and public administration (7%) (Gall 2025). This sectoral distribution and geographic

dispersion – rather than concentration in a handful of mega-strikes – reflects peak-body coordination's structural logic: TUC machinery is optimized for breadth and simultaneity across many affiliates, not for deep tactical mobilization within a single sector. The 2,137 instances of strike action across the wave period, with no single action accounting for the dominant share of total days, is the morphological fingerprint of the N30 coordination model operating at full scale (Gall 2025).

From Labor Notes to the Stand-Up Strike: How Pre-Pandemic Networks Grew into Coordination Infrastructure in the United States

The United States wave was not organized from the top of the labor movement down. It was organized by people who had trained in rank-and-file networks, carried specific tactical knowledge from prior campaigns, and occupied strategic leadership positions when the post-pandemic conjuncture opened. The mechanism through which pre-pandemic coordination infrastructure became the wave channel is traceable through named individuals moving from the informal activist networks of the 2010s directly into the leadership positions from which each major wave-period campaign was designed and executed.

Personnel continuity. The single clearest connection between pre-pandemic infrastructure and wave-period outcomes is Chris Brooks. Brooks was a Labor Notes staff writer and organizer before being recruited as Shawn Fain's chief strategist during the UAW reform transition. He managed the UAW transition team and became Chief of Staff, where he was subsequently identified as one of the lead architects of the Stand-Up Strike strategy – the UAW's September 2023 simultaneous campaign against all three

major automakers (Brooks, Jacobin, February 2026; New Labor Forum 2026). His February 2026 Jacobin account confirms the strategy was developed during the runoff period and executed immediately upon Fain taking office (Brooks, Jacobin, February 2026). Labor Notes did not advise the Stand-Up Strike from outside the UAW: a Labor Notes staffer became the UAW Chief of Staff and designed it.

UAWD's founders represent a personnel chain extending back four decades. Jane Slaughter's September 2023 Labor Notes analysis documented the line of succession: "Some of the UAWD founders were part of Autoworker Caravan, a group founded in 2008... Caravan in turn incorporated veterans of the New Directions Movement of the 1980s... Some UAWD leaders today go back as far as New Directions" (Slaughter, Labor Notes, September 2023). Named founders include Scott Houldieson (Local 551 Vice President, UAWD founding chair, Labor Notes supporter), Frank Hammer (former Local 909 president, Autoworker Caravan veteran), and Bill Parker (forty-year UAW reform veteran) (Slaughter, Labor Notes, September 2023). Slaughter's assessment was explicit: "If UAWD had not existed and organized hard, this current fight that has potential to change the stakes for the entire labor movement would not be happening" (Slaughter, Labor Notes, September 2023). Brandon Mancilla, 28, had been the first president of the Harvard Graduate Students Union Local 5118 and served on the 2019 Harvard strike coordinating team before running on the UAWD-backed Members United slate and being elected UAW Region 9A Director – carried the network directly into the union's institutional structure (Mancilla profile, The Nation, 2023).

The Starbucks pipeline runs through a precisely documented personnel chain. Jaz Brisack worked on the UAW's 2017 Nissan campaign in Mississippi, where they met Richard Bensinger – former AFL-CIO Organizing Director during the 1990s. In 2018, Bensinger, Brisack, and Chris Townsend founded the Inside Organizer School to train salts (In These Times; connection report). Brisack organized SPoT Coffee in Buffalo through Workers United in 2019, then salted at the Elmwood Avenue Starbucks in 2020, catalyzing the first Starbucks union election in December 2021 and subsequently over 600 store unionizations (Wikipedia, Jaz Brisack; In These Times). Brisack's own account identified the network's necessity: "We needed folks who'd been through union campaigns before... We had Richard Bensinger, who's been organizing for 50 years" (Brisack, In These Times). The WGA's connection is similarly explicit. Co-chairs Chris Keyser (WGA West president 2011–15) and David Goodman (president 2017–21) led the 2023 strike; David Young, lead negotiator in 2007–08, had trained his protégée Ellen Stutzman, WGA staff since 2006, who became chief negotiator in 2023 (Variety 2024). Keyser identified the mechanism directly: "It's an unbroken chain of sacrifice and bravery that begins with the generation that fought the strike of 2007 and 2008, and it extends to the strike authorization vote of 2017 and the strike of 2023" (Keyser, Variety, February 2024).

Structural continuity. Three network structures account for the pre-pandemic infrastructure's operational continuity. Labor Notes biennial conferences grew from approximately 1,000 pre-pandemic to 4,000 at the first post-COVID gathering in 2022, featuring Chris Smalls (Amazon Labor Union), Michelle Eisen (Starbucks Workers

United), Sean O'Brien (Teamsters), Stacy Davis Gates (CTU), and Bernie Sanders sharing the same stage (DiMaggio and Furman 2018; connection report). The New York Times labor correspondent Noam Scheiber described it as "arguably the epicenter of the U.S. labor movement" (Scheiber, Twitter/NYT, 2022). By the 2024 conference, attendance had reached 4,700, with an estimated 2,000 on the waiting list (Fain, Jacobin, April 2024). Shawn Fain delivered the conference's keynote holding up his dog-eared, highlighted copy of A Troublemakers Handbook, the 1991 Labor Notes publication, and stated: "As a young union activist, I had another bible – The Troublemakers Handbook from Labor Notes. This was my bible when I became a union rep, and it taught me how to fight the boss." He continued: "I would not be standing here today as president of the UAW if it wasn't for the badass members of UAWD, a reform caucus... In UAWD, we were also inspired by the Teamsters for a Democratic Union. We drew a boatload of inspiration from Labor Notes and everybody else who has fought to put the movement back in the labor movement" (Fain, Jacobin, April 2024). This is self-attribution in its strongest possible form: the leader of the decade's most significant strike campaign, identifying in public, in front of 4,700 witnesses, the specific pre-pandemic organizations responsible for his capacity to act.

UCORE, the cross-union educator reform caucus network anchored by Labor Notes, held twice-monthly Zoom meetings "pretty much steadily for over a decade" since coalescing after the 2010 CORE takeover of the CTU, confirmed by UCORE coordinator Ellen David Friedman in March 2026 (Friedman, Notes From Below, March 2026). Member caucuses span NEA and AFT affiliates across eight major cities: CORE

Chicago, MORE-UFT NYC, Union Power Los Angeles, Caucus of Working Educators Philadelphia, EDU Massachusetts, SEE Seattle, BMORE Baltimore, REACH Minneapolis (Friedman, Notes From Below, March 2026). TDU's UPS campaign followed the same structural logic: TDU had formed the UPS Teamsters United network to fight contract givebacks in 2018; in 2023, it put that network into action, with over 15,000 UPS Teamsters participating in webinars and workshops during the contract campaign (TDU 2023; Eidlin, In These Times, 2024). Fain at the TDU Convention in November 2023 was unambiguous: "There is no Stand-Up Strike without TDU" (Fain, TDU Convention, November 2023; Eidlin, In These Times, 2024).

Timeline of the Wave: Starbucks and ALU, December 2021–April 2022. An early breakthrough came on 9 December 2021, when workers at the Elmwood Avenue Starbucks in Buffalo, New York voted to form the first union in the company's US history (CBS News 2021; Jacobin 2021). The victory followed the Inside Organizer School pipeline precisely: Brisack, trained by Bensinger at the 2018 IOS, salted at the store in 2020 and coordinated the 2021 campaign with Workers United. What had been a single location became a national movement within months: union petitions were filed at hundreds of Starbucks locations, and over 600 stores had voted to unionize by 2024, making Starbucks the largest private-sector organizing drive in decades (SBWU 2024; Wikipedia, Starbucks unions). The Starbucks wave demonstrated that workers in a sector long considered unorganizable – high-turnover, part-time, franchise-adjacent service work – could build durable union structures when equipped with the Inside Organizer School's salting methodology.

A second ignition point came in April 2022, when workers at Amazon's JFK8 warehouse in Staten Island voted to form the Amazon Labor Union – the first union in Amazon's US history (ALU 2022; Politico 2022). ALU differed structurally from the Starbucks campaign: as NPR noted, organizer Chris Smalls "had zero union background, nor did he rely on any established labor groups" (NPR 2022). ALU's victory was in this sense anomalous – a genuinely spontaneous eruption without the network infrastructure that characterized every other major wave-period campaign. Its significance was nonetheless catalytic: it demonstrated that even Amazon, the most aggressive anti-union employer in the United States, could be organized, and it generated enormous media amplification that contributed to the broad shift in public perception of labor organizing (EPI 2024a).

November–December 2022 also saw 48,000 graduate students and academic workers across the University of California system begin the largest academic strike in US history, lasting five weeks and winning substantial wage increases – demonstrating that public sector workers behind legal constraints could sustain large-scale coordinated action (LA Times 2022a; LA Times 2022b).

Railroad confrontation and the inflation context: Late 2022. The macroeconomic context of the wave's opening phase was defined by inflation running at 9.1% in June 2022, the highest since 1981, eroding real wages even as nominal compensation rose (BLS, CPI, June 2022). Rail workers, frustrated by inadequate sick leave provisions, prepared to strike in December 2022, but Congress intervened to impose a contract settlement, preventing the work stoppage (NPR 2022; Politico 2022b).

The federal intervention demonstrated the structural limits of strike power in sectors legislatively defined as critical to the national economy, while simultaneously confirming that the political pressure generated by the threat of a national rail strike was substantial. Rail workers subsequently secured improved sick leave through continued pressure on individual carriers, suggesting that even constrained collective action could yield incremental results (IBEW 2023; BNSF Railway 2023).

Hot Labor Summer: The wave's peak, May–October 2023. The concentration of major strikes in 2023 constituted the most significant period of American labor militancy since the mid-twentieth century. The Writers Guild of America initiated a strike in May 2023, demanding improved compensation for streaming content and protections against AI displacement (WGA 2023). The WGA's co-chairs, Keyser and Goodman, had been trained in the 2007–08 wave; lead negotiator Ellen Stutzman was a WGA staff veteran of the same dispute (Variety 2024). The institutional memory was operational, not archival. In July, SAG-AFTRA joined the picket lines, creating the first simultaneous strike by both Hollywood guilds since 1960 (LA Times 2023b). SAG-AFTRA President Fran Drescher's announcement speech framed the action as fundamental: "We are the victims here, but we stand tall" (LA Times 2023c). The eventual settlements in September and October included groundbreaking AI protections establishing that artificial intelligence could not be used to replace writers or diminish their creative authority – precedents extending far beyond the entertainment industry (LA Times 2023a; Perkins Coie 2024).

The UPS campaign represented the wave's most precise expression of how pre-pandemic network infrastructure was converted into contract leverage. TDU had built the UPS Teamsters United network through Vote No campaigns in 2013 and 2018; in 2023, it put that network into action (TDU 2023). TDU Co-chair Eugene Braswell: "We showed UPS that we were ready to strike…That's how we ended a generation of givebacks" (TDU 2023). The credible strike threat from 340,000 workers, without a single day of actual work stoppage, produced a July 2023 settlement that included commitments to install air conditioning in delivery vehicles – a provision addressing long-standing worker health and safety concerns – and substantial wage improvements (Teamsters 2023b; WTTW 2023). Eidlin's analysis in In These Times confirmed TDU's central role: "TDU played a critical role in developing and implementing the IBT's UPS contract campaign" (Eidlin, In These Times, 2024).

The United Auto Workers Stand-Up Strike launched in September 2023, targeting all three major automakers simultaneously for the first time in UAW history (NPR 2023b). The strategic architecture designed by Chris Brooks and implemented through UAWD's organizational infrastructure, involved staged escalation rather than mass walkout: the union began by striking specific plants and added facilities incrementally, targeting the most profitable locations to maximize employer disruption while conserving strike funds (Brooks, Jacobin, February 2026). Fain's public communication throughout the strike – direct-to-member video updates, transparent escalation announcements – reflected the Labor Notes ethos of member education and engagement that Brooks had absorbed through years of labor press work. The Stand-Up Strike ended in late October

with record contracts at all three automakers (Labor Notes 2023). The Kaiser Permanente healthcare strike in October 2023 brought 85,000 workers out in the largest healthcare strike in US history, winning a 21% wage increase over four years (NPR 2023a; SEIU-UHW 2023a; SEIU-UHW 2023b).

The Shape of the United States Strike Wave. The aggregate statistics register the US wave's network-driven character. BLS data document 458,900 workers involved in major work stoppages in 2023 – a 280% year-over-year increase from 2022's 120,600 (EPI 2024a). Cornell ILR's Labor Action Tracker recorded 24.9 million strike days in 2023, a 465% increase from 2022's 4.4 million – itself far above the 2010–19 annual average of 1.3 million (Cornell ILR 2023; Cornell ILR 2024). The 2023 figure exceeded the entire decade's total from 2010–2019 (12.98 million days) (BLS 2024a). Most diagnostically: strikes generating at least 1,000 idle days accounted for 96.8% of total 2023 strike days – 24.1 million of 24.9 million – meaning a small number of very large, sustained actions dominated the wave entirely (Cornell ILR 2023; EPI 2024a). This mega-strike concentration is the morphological fingerprint of network-driven coordination: horizontal informal networks are structurally optimized for facilitating deep tactical mobilization within targeted sectors, not for generating broad simultaneity across many sectors simultaneously.

The private-sector character of the US wave further distinguishes it from the UK morphology: entertainment (WGA, SAG-AFTRA), logistics (UPS), manufacturing (UAW), and healthcare (Kaiser) – all private sector, all NLRA-covered, all sectors where union density remained low enough that the organizing represented genuine structural

penetration of previously non-union terrain. Novel-sector penetration – Starbucks (600+ stores), Amazon (ALU), streaming-era entertainment (AI-provisions contracts) – characterized a wave that operated not by mobilizing existing density but by converting network infrastructure and tactical knowledge into new organizing capacity where it had not previously existed (EPI 2024a; Cornell ILR 2024). The wave moderated in 2024: 271,500 workers in strikes, elevated relative to the 2010–19 baseline but substantially below 2023's exceptional peak (McNicholas et al. 2025). The October 2024 International Longshoremen's Association strike – 45,000 dockers, 2 days – demonstrated continued capacity for large-scale coordinated action even in a moderating environment (McNicholas et al. 2025).

IV. Synthesis and Evaluation

The preceding sections have established four things on the evidentiary record: both countries experienced definitive post-pandemic strike waves (DV=1); pandemic-era income supports were withdrawn in both countries while inflation exceeded target and real wages were declining (IV1=1 for both); coordination networks in both countries were operationally active before March 2020 (IV2=1 for both); and the mechanism connecting IV2 to the wave outcome is traceable through named personnel and specific organizational forms in both cases. This section evaluates the three hypotheses against that evidence, and then turns to the larger theoretical questions the US-UK comparison is positioned to address.

H1 – The Rollback Hypothesis.

H1 predicts that economically premature withdrawal of pandemic income supports drives the wave outcome. The evidence is consistent with H1: both countries experienced IV1=1 rollbacks and both produced waves. H1 is not contradicted here, and the chapter makes no claim that it is. What this chapter establishes is that rollback, wherever it occurred, landed into coordination networks that were already operational. Whether rollback is sufficient in the absence of that second condition is a question the negative cases answer. H1 is recorded as a necessary condition pending that test.

H3 – The Mobilization Capacity Hypothesis.

H3 predicts that structurally stronger labor movements produce larger strike waves. The US case falsifies it directly. By every metric H3 treats as determinative – union density (9.9% vs. 22%), collective bargaining coverage (5.9% private-sector vs. 23%), legal framework, peak-body architecture – the US should produce a substantially weaker wave than the UK. It produced a larger one: 24.9 million strike days in 2023 against 5.05 million across nineteen UK months. H3 also fails in the opposite direction: if structural advantage predicted magnitude, the UK wave should have substantially exceeded the US wave. It did not. Falsified on both counts.

H2 – The Activation Sequencing Hypothesis.

H2 predicts that premature rollback conjoined with pre-activated coordination networks produces the wave outcome. H2 is consistent with the evidence in both cases and accounts for what H1 and H3 cannot. Both countries entered the post-pandemic period with IV2=1 networks, regardless of structural baseline. Both produced waves of

comparable scale through structurally distinct organizational channels. H2 is confirmed as providing the necessary conjunction and the explanatory logic for the within-configuration variation.

Theoretical Implications

Strikes-as-strength, strikes-as-weakness ambiguity. Chapter 1 identified a fundamental analytical ambiguity in the classical literature: strike wave occurrence is a poor guide to underlying labor movement strength, because waves can emerge from defensive mobilization just as readily as from positions of organizational advantage. The US-UK comparison makes this ambiguity concrete and resolves it in a specific way. Weber and Wasner's (2023) sellers' inflation framework correctly characterizes the grievance structure of both waves: workers were defending declining real purchasing power, not advancing from a position of structural strength. But the strikes-as-weakness reading, while correct about the defensive character of the conflict, cannot explain why the structurally weaker US movement produced a larger wave than the structurally stronger UK movement – nor can the strikes-as-strength reading explain why the UK's superior density and formal coordination architecture did not translate into proportionally larger outcomes. What the comparison establishes is that neither structural strength nor structural weakness predicts wave scale. The relevant variable – activation state – is orthogonal to structural position. Movements can be structurally weak and activationally live, or structurally strong and activationally live, and in both cases produce waves when the triggering condition arrives. The morphological difference between the two waves – mega-strike concentration in the US, distributed simultaneity in the UK – is where

structural position does leave a trace: not in whether a wave occurred, but in what kind of wave the organizational channel was capable of producing.

VoC coordination problem. Hall and Soskice's (2001) framework predicts that LME institutional logic – decentralized bargaining, weak employment protections, competitive labor markets – should produce fragmented, episodic industrial conflict rather than synchronized waves. Chapter 1 accepted this not as a causal prediction, but a characterization of the coordination problem LME labor movements face. The US-UK comparison speaks directly to this characterization by demonstrating two distinct solutions to the same problem. Both countries lack institutionalized mechanisms for synchronizing action across sectors. Both nonetheless produced synchronized cross-sector waves. The UK solution ran through formal TUC machinery – Congress mandates, General Council roundtables, synchronized ballot coordination – what Ornston and Schulze-Cleven (2015) would classify as durable production-level coordination rather than state-facilitated concertation. The US solution ran through informal horizontal networks – Labor Notes conferences, reform caucuses, the Inside Organizer School – a form of coordination not anticipated in either the VoC framework or its growth-model successors. Howell's (2021) argument that coordination infrastructure is actively built and dismantled through political decisions rather than simply inherited from institutional configurations is directly confirmed: both the TUC's austerity-era operational intensification and the US reform caucus infrastructure were constructed through deliberate organizing decisions in response to specific political provocations. The comparison thus does not challenge the VoC framework's diagnosis of the LME

coordination problem; it challenges the implication that the problem is unsolvable within LME conditions. Two distinct organizational pathways, both constructed rather than inherited, both produced IV2=1 activation states sufficient for wave-level mobilization.

Possession/use wedge in the power resources tradition. Chapter 1 traced a line of development within the PRA tradition from Wright's (2000) explicitly static associational power concept through Silver's (2003) possession/use wedge, Korpi's (1985) mobilization-maintenance-application stages, Levesque and Murray's (2010) resources/capabilities distinction, and Goods et al.'s (2024) two-state model – each successive formulation moving closer to treating the operational state of networks as a variable rather than a background condition. The US-UK comparison provides the most direct empirical test of this developmental trajectory available in the post-pandemic literature. The UK's associational power stock, by every measure Wright or Schmalz et al. (2018) would use to assess it, substantially exceeds the US figure. The US wave nonetheless equaled and on some metrics exceeded the UK wave. The only account consistent with both outcomes is the one Levesque and Murray anticipate: resources do not determine outcomes; the capability to translate resources into coordinated action does. And the capability that mattered here – activated networks, operationally exercised before the shock arrived – was present in both cases despite the structural asymmetry. Arnholtz and Refslund's (2022) insistence that what matters is whether members are active and willing to act, not just how many there are, is instantiated precisely: the US wave was produced by a smaller, less resourced movement whose networks had been

more recently and intensively exercised, not by a movement with more associational power in the classical sense.

Diani's structural/operational distinction and abeyance theory. Diani's (2003) distinction between network structures that connect organizations in principle and the actual flow of resources, tactics, and decisions through those structures is the conceptual hinge on which the chapter's argument turns. The US and UK cases document both sides of this distinction in positive form: networks that were not merely structurally present but operationally active, through which tactics, personnel, and organizational templates were actively flowing in the years before the pandemic. The UK documentation – personnel continuity from N30 through the 2022–23 wave, TUC Solidarity Hub formalizing intelligence flows across 34 unions, February 1 synchronization replicating the N30 mechanism precisely – establishes operational activation at the institutional level. The US documentation – Chris Brooks moving from Labor Notes staff to UAW Chief of Staff and designing the Stand-Up Strike, Jane Slaughter's chain running from New Directions through Autoworker Caravan through UAWD, UCORE's decade of twice-monthly calls – establishes operational activation at the network level. Both cases thus speak directly to Taylor's (1989) abeyance structure concept: neither network went dormant between activation and wave. The TUC infrastructure was continuously exercised through the austerity decade; the US reform caucus networks were continuously exercised through the Fight for $15 and Red for Ed periods. What the cases document is not the reactivation of dormant infrastructure but the deployment of infrastructure that had never been allowed to lapse. The distinction matters for theory: the abeyance concept anticipates that

networks can survive low-mobilization periods in a maintenance state; the US-UK evidence establishes that neither network needed to exit maintenance, because both had been kept in operational exercise continuously through to the pandemic's onset.

Biggs's cascade model and wave morphology. Biggs (2005) models strike waves as self-amplifying processes in which information about employers' revealed vulnerability propagates through organizational and community networks, inducing further action that initial grievance conditions alone could not have generated. The US-UK morphological difference provides a direct test of this cascade logic at the level of network architecture. In the UK, the cascade propagated through TUC formal machinery – synchronizing ballot timing across affiliates, producing February 1 simultaneous action across five sectors, generating the highest concentration of public-sector action since 1926. The cascade's structure followed the network's structure: broad, simultaneous, distributed across 34,424 workplaces and 2,137 instances of action. In the US, the cascade propagated through reform caucus networks – the Stand-Up Strike's staged escalation targeting the most profitable plants, the Starbucks pipeline running from the Inside Organizer School through 600 store victories, the WGA's 2007–08 institutional memory flowing through named individuals into 2023. The cascade's structure again followed the network's structure: concentrated, sequential, producing a small number of very large, sustained actions accounting for 96.8% of total days. Kallas's (2023) finding that strike form reflects available coordination capacity is confirmed at wave scale, and extended: it is not merely the form of individual strikes but the morphology of entire waves that reflects the coordination infrastructure through which they propagate. This is

the within-configuration finding that only a two-case comparison with shared conjunctural conditions can produce – the same IV1=1, IV2=1 conjunction generating structurally distinct wave morphologies as a function of the organizational channel through which activation was achieved.

Conclusion

The United States and United Kingdom share activation state and diverge in institutional form, structural strength, legal framework, and organizational pathway. They produced waves of comparable scale and distinct morphological character. The comparison establishes three things simultaneously:

- First, the strikes-as-strength and strikes-as-weakness ambiguity the literature identifies is real but resolvable: activation state is the variable that determines wave occurrence, while the pathway to activation shapes the wave's form.

- Second, the LME coordination problem the VoC tradition diagnoses is contingently rather than structurally unsolvable: two distinct constructed pathways, neither of them institutionally guaranteed, both produced the activation state sufficient for wave-level mobilization when the triggering condition arrived.

- Third, the US-UK comparison speaks directly to the unresolved tension the PRA tradition has been working toward across successive reformulations. Wright's static stock measure, Silver's possession/use wedge, Korpi's mobilization-maintenance-application stages, and Levesque and Murray's resources/capabilities distinction each move closer to treating the operational state of networks as an independent variable rather than a background condition. The US-UK comparison puts that variable to work: two

movements with radically different resource stocks, both with operationally active networks, both producing waves of comparable scale. The evidence is consistent with what the later PRA formulations anticipate – that activation state, not resource quantity, is what converts a shared shock into a wave – and inconsistent with what the earlier stock-measure formulations predict.

CHAPTER 4: CONTAINMENT CASES (AUSTRALIA, NEW ZEALAND, IRELAND)

The preceding chapter established the core logic of activation sequencing through two cases that are both archetypal LME's, and archetypal post-pandemic strike wave cases: the United States and the United Kingdom. Both entered the post-pandemic period with labor movement coordination networks that had been operationally activated in the preceding decade, and both experienced economically premature rollback of pandemic-era supports. The conjunction of those two conditions produced, in each case, a sustained post-pandemic strike wave – the largest in a generation.

This chapter will examine three cases where those two circumstances did not intersect: Australia, New Zealand, and Ireland.

None of these three countries experienced a post-pandemic strike wave by the operational criteria of this dissertation, though different mechanisms were responsible for each country avoiding a post-pandemic strike wave. Australia and New Zealand did not experience waves because economically premature rollback was absent: relative to the U.S. and U.K., pandemic supports in this chapter's cases were all withdrawn after macroeconomic conditions had stabilized, avoiding the most acute backlash that premature withdrawal generated elsewhere. Ireland did not experience a wave despite the first condition being present: rollback occurred before real wages had recovered and while inflation remained well above target. Ireland's non-wave outcome is explained not by the absence of grievance, but by the absence of the second condition: pre-pandemic activation of coordination networks.

The chapter proceeds as follows:

Part I documents the d3ependent variable for each case, establishing through the two-criterion definition that none qualifies as a post-pandemic strike wave while attending to the different character of each non-wave outcome. This section also establishes the shared basis for comparison and identifies the analytical stakes of the within-group divergence.

Parts II and III then code the independent variables and trace the mechanisms through which each country's particular conjunction of conditions produced its observed outcome.

Part IV ("Synthesis") analyzes each of these three cases based on the relationship between activated networks and industrial pressure, independent of the wave threshold. While none of these three cases reached the threshold to qualify as a post-pandemic strike wave, both Australia and New Zealand – the cases where IV1 was absent and IV2 was present – nevertheless exhibited measurable growth in strike activity relative to their immediately preceding baseline periods. Only Ireland – the case where IV2 was absent – showed no growth at all, declining sharply from already-low pre-pandemic figures. This asymmetry is theoretically significant: it suggests that activated coordination networks are associated with sustained industrial pressure even in the absence of the wave-level triggering condition, while latent networks suppress even the grievance-driven activity that unfavorable macroeconomic conditions would otherwise generate.

The preceding chapter established that the conjunction of both conditions (premature rollback, pre-activated coordination networks) produced post-pandemic strike

waves of comparable scale and distinct morphological character through institutionally distinct organizational pathways in the United States and United Kingdom. This chapter establishes that the conjunction is genuinely conjunctural: the absence of either condition is sufficient to prevent a wave, regardless of the remaining condition's value. Australia and New Zealand test the necessity of premature rollback; Ireland tests the necessity of pre-activated networks.

I. Post-Pandemic Strike Waves Absent.

A post-pandemic strike wave, as operationalized in chapters 1 and 2, requires that two criteria be simultaneously satisfied:

- Criterion 1 demands robust exceptionalism against the prior decade. For the post-pandemic period (2021-2024), at least one metric must exceed the 2010-2019 average by at least 100 percent in at least one year; post-pandemic values must exceed prior decade peaks in at least three instances across the three standard metrics (number of disputes, number of workers involved, and number of working days lost); and post-pandemic averages for all three metrics must at least match prior decade averages.
- Criterion 2 demands disjuncture from pre-pandemic trends. Strike activity must exhibit a clear break from the trajectory established in 2018 and 2019. A case whose post-pandemic metrics are already in line with its 2018-2019 baseline has not escalated beyond what pre-pandemic conditions had established.

Applied to Australia, New Zealand, and Ireland, no single country meets both criteria, though for reasons that differ substantially from case to case.

Australia

Criterion 1 – Robust exceptionalism against the prior decade: Not met.

Australia's post-pandemic strike metrics represent a recovery from a historically depressed 2018-2019 baseline, not exceptional escalation. Working days lost (WDL) averaged 137,900 per year across 2021-2024, essentially matching the prior decade average of approximately 144,000 (ABS, 2024). On first inspection this appears to approach the period-average requirement. But the critical sub-tests establish the absence of exceptionalism. No post-pandemic year produced any metric exceeding the 2010-2019 decade average by 100 percent: the highest single-year figure, 196,800 WDL in 2022, was only approximately 37 percent above the decade mean – well short of the doubling threshold. No post-pandemic metric surpassed the corresponding prior-decade peak: the 2022 WDL figure of 196,800 fell substantially short of the 2012 peak of 273,200; the highest post-pandemic employee count of 128,900 workers in 2022 fell short of the 2012 peak of 159,800; and the highest estimated post-pandemic dispute count fell short of the 2016 peak of 254. The three-instances requirement for peak exceptionalism is not met. Workers involved and disputes both declined marginally below decade averages in the post-pandemic period. Criterion 1 is not met.

Criterion 2 – Disjuncture from pre-pandemic trends: Met, but producing a false positive that Criterion 1 corrects.

Criterion 2 asks whether post-pandemic activity represents a genuine break from the immediate pre-pandemic trajectory: whether mobilization is specifically a post-pandemic phenomenon, rather than a continuation of a trend already underway. In

Australia's case, Criterion 2 appears satisfied: working days lost averaged just 85,100 across 2018-2019, with 2019 alone recording 64,400 WDL approaching a historic low. By 2022, WDL rebounded to 196,800, more than double the 2018-2019 average. There is a clear discontinuity from the immediate pre-pandemic baseline.

But the Criterion 2 result here is an artifact of baseline selection rather than evidence of genuine post-pandemic escalation. Australia's 2018-2019 period was anomalously quiet even by the standards of a country with declining strike trends. The 2010-2017 average WDL was approximately 158,000–160,000 – substantially above the post-pandemic figure. Measured against the full prior decade rather than its anomalously depressed final two years, Australia's post-pandemic activity is not a disjuncture at all: it is reversion toward the historical mean.

The 2022 spike that generates the apparent disjuncture is further concentrated rather than distributed. It is substantially attributable to a cluster of education sector strikes in a single quarter: a public school stoppage on May 4 (NSWTF, tens of thousands of teachers statewide); a Catholic school stoppage on May 27 (IEU, approximately 18,000 teachers and support staff); and a historic joint stoppage on June 30 across the approximately 85,000 combined NSWTF and IEU membership – the first joint action across public and Catholic school systems in over 25 years (ABC, 2022; IEU, 2022; NSWTF, 2022). The ABS industry breakdown for Q2 2022 shows the Education and training; Health care and social assistance grouping accounting for 91 percent of that quarter's 128,100 WDL, with New South Wales alone contributing 94 percent of the national total (ABS, 2022b). The author's estimate derived from quarterly ABS industry

breakdowns suggests education accounted for approximately 65–67 percent of the 196,800 WDL recorded across all of 2022 (ABS, 2022a; 2022b; 2022c). That 2022 spike was followed by a sharp drop to 99,200 WDL in 2023 as disputes resolved through institutional mechanisms (ABS, 2024). Spike, institutional resolution, reversion – that is the signature of contained bargaining pressure, not a wave.

This case illustrates precisely why Criterion 2 alone is insufficient and why both criteria are required jointly. Criterion 2 is designed to establish that mobilization is genuinely post-pandemic, that it represents a new episode rather than a pre-existing trend arriving at the measurement window. In Australia's case, however, Criterion 2 is satisfied only because the comparison baseline is anomalously low. Criterion 1 provides the corrective: measured against the full prior decade rather than its most depressed years, Australia's post-pandemic figures are not exceptional. Criterion 2 produces a false positive that Criterion 1 catches. The conjunction requirement yields the correct classification where either criterion alone would not.

DV coded: No wave.

Australia's post-pandemic activity exhibits containment: genuine industrial pressure produced real bargaining outcomes, but that pressure was channeled through enterprise-by-enterprise institutional processes and did not cross the exceptionalism threshold. Relative to the US, UK, and Quebec – and relative to Australia itself a decade earlier – the post-pandemic period does not represent a qualitatively distinct episode of sustained, multidimensional escalation.

New Zealand

Criterion 1 – Robust exceptionalism against the prior decade: Partially met.

New Zealand's post-pandemic metrics present a more complex picture than Australia's, and the partial satisfaction of Criterion 1 requires careful disaggregation to avoid misreading what the numbers show:

- Workers involved averaged 20,101 per year across 2021-2024, more than doubling the 2010-2019 decade average of 8,691. Person-days lost (PDL) averaged 96,237, nearly tripling the decade average of 33,399.
- Across all three major metrics (number of stoppages, employees involved, person-days lost/PDL), the 2021-2024 average is higher than the 2010-2019 pre-pandemic baseline: in addition to the aforementioned growth in PDL and persons involved numbers, stoppages increase from 38.3 to 40.0.
- Two metric-year instances exceed prior-decade peaks: workers involved in 2023 (69,843 vs. the decade peak of 44,030 in 2019) and PDL in 2022 (302,948 vs. the decade peak of 78,589 in 2012). The 2023 PDL figure of 69,837 comes close to but falls short of the 2012 peak by approximately 11 percent.

Taking a conservative approach, and to avoid downplaying evidence contrary to New Zealand's negative coding, I judge that New Zealand is so close that it satisfies the exceptionalism criterion for all practical purposes.

The 2022 PDL anomaly requires specific explanation because it is the number most likely to create a misleading impression. The figure of 302,948 person-days lost corresponds to approximately 39 person-days per worker, driven by rolling one-hour

strikes undertaken by members of the New Zealand Professional Firefighters Union (NZPFU). In the same year, the number of workers involved was just 7,722, the second-lowest figure in the 2021-2024 period and lower than the pre-pandemic baseline.

So New Zealand is a borderline case, with clear signs of escalation relative to the 2010-2019 baseline comparison period. However, that escalation does not necessarily denote a diffusion or spread of strike activity – which the checklist for the dependent variable is intended to capture, and which does show up in the US and UK cases. Under Criterion 2, we will go over the limitations of this escalation.

Criterion 2 – Disjuncture from pre-pandemic trends: Not met.

Criterion 2 is the decisive test for New Zealand: while escalation is apparent, this is a clear case of strike activity narrowing rather than broadening.

- Number of stoppages: decreases from 154.5 (2018-2019) to 40.0 (2021-2024)
- Number of employees involved: decreases from 27,874.5 (2018-2019) to 20,100.8 (2021-2024)
- Person-days of work lost: increases from 41,628.8 (2018-2019) to 96,237 (2021-2024)

Comparing the post-pandemic 2021-2024 window to the 2018-2019 period immediately preceding the pandemic, the post-pandemic years show fewer workers on fewer strikes that last longer.

New Zealand's labor movement had already mounted a substantial strike wave in 2018-2019 under the incoming Ardern Labour government. In 2018 alone, MBIE recorded 166 stoppages involving 11,719 workers; in 2019, 143 stoppages involving

44,030 workers were recorded, the highest worker-involvement figure in the series (MBIE, 2024; Wright and McLaughlin, 2021).

Notably, unlike the United States – which also exhibited some escalation in 2018-2019 – New Zealand shows pronounced decline in multiple metrics from 2018-2019 to the post-pandemic period: annual stoppages averaged 40.0 across 2021-2024, a 74 percent decline from the 2018-2019 average of 154.5; workers involved averaged 20,101, a 28 percent decline from the 2018-2019 average of 27,875.

What the post-pandemic period shows is a shift in the form of industrial action rather than escalation in its scale. The 2018-2019 pattern was characterized by frequent, brief, sector-specific stoppages – predominantly one-day or half-day actions in healthcare, education, and public services. The 2021-2024 pattern is characterized by fewer but longer disputes by smaller groups of workers – the inversion of the earlier pattern. The 2022 PDL statistic is precisely the statistical signature of this tactic shift: lower stoppage counts, lower worker counts, but dramatically higher person-days per action. Parker and Alakavuklar (2023) confirmed this 2018-2019 strike revival in their analysis of union collective action in New Zealand, establishing that the elevated baseline was a pre-pandemic phenomenon. Post-pandemic activity did not escalate beyond what the pre-pandemic trajectory had already produced. Criterion 2 requires a break from the 2018-2019 trajectory, not merely from a static floor: because that trajectory was already elevated, activity that continues along it – even at higher absolute levels on some metrics – does not constitute the upward disjuncture the criterion demands. Criterion 2 is not met.

DV coded: No post-pandemic wave. New Zealand's post-pandemic period represents continuity with its elevated 2018-2019 baseline rather than a new wave triggered by pandemic conditions. The tactic shift toward fewer, longer, and more consequential disputes explains anomalous PDL figures without altering the coding: the post-2018 elevated baseline was established before the pandemic, and no meaningful disjuncture is observable in the post-pandemic period.

Ireland

Criterion 1 – Robust exceptionalism against the prior decade: Not met; the pattern is exceptional decline.

Like New Zealand, Ireland's post-pandemic record requires analysis of exceptionalism – but in the opposite direction, to account for a pronounced decrease following the pandemic.

The Central Statistics Office (CSO) data (data.cso.ie, PxStat table IDQ02) record the following figures for the post-pandemic period (CSO, 2024):

- Work stoppages: 9.2 annual average (2010-2019) vs 5.5 disputes (2021-2024) – 40% decrease
- Workers involved: 17,321 annual average (2010-2019) vs 2,217 workers (2021-2024) – 87% decrease
- Workers involved: 27,211 annual average (2010-2019) vs 3,663 days lost (2021-2024) – 87% decrease

No metric even approaches the pre-pandemic baseline. These are not merely non-exceptional figures; they are figures that represent a historically unprecedented

contraction in Irish industrial dispute activity. Teague, Roche, Gormley, and Currie (2015) had already documented Ireland's transformation from one of the most strike-prone economies in Europe to one of the least, but the post-pandemic period has extended that trajectory to its logical endpoint. Criterion 1 is not met – the post-pandemic period does not exhibit exceptionalism in any direction that would qualify as a wave.

Criterion 2 – Disjuncture from pre-pandemic trends: Not met; the post-pandemic period continues and deepens the pre-pandemic downward trajectory.

Ireland's 2018-2019 baseline was itself already at very low levels: 9 disputes and approximately 1,814 workers involved in 2018, generating just 4,050 days lost. The 2019 figure was distorted upward by the INMO nurses' strike, involving 42,656 workers – but even including that spike, the two-year average is not suggestive of a labor movement on the verge of a wave. Post-pandemic activity is lower than the 2018 baseline on workers involved and days lost, and lower than either year on disputes. There is no upward disjuncture from the immediately preceding period; there is a further contraction. Criterion 2 is not met because the direction of movement is the reverse of what a wave requires.

DV coded: No wave. Ireland's post-pandemic period exhibits demobilization – not mere non-escalation but a sustained, historically exceptional decrease in every measure of strike activity. The post-pandemic period records the lowest sustained levels in the modern CSO series. This demobilization occurred despite Ireland facing post-pandemic inflation that reached 9.2 percent in October 2022 (CSO, 2022) and a rollback of pandemic supports that preceded macroeconomic stabilization. The absence of

escalation is not a function of absent grievance; it requires an account of the organizational and institutional mechanisms through which grievance was channeled away from industrial action.

Basis for Comparison

The three countries discussed in this chapter share a common negative coding on the dependent variable (absence of a post-pandemic strike wave), yet each country demonstrates a different pathway for reaching that outcome.

Australia and New Zealand both show that activated networks continued to generate industrial pressure, even when the wave-level triggering condition is absent – Australia through contained institutional disputes that recovered from the 2018-2019 trough, New Zealand through the continuation of the elevated 2018-2019 trajectory. Ireland, by contrast, shows no such pressure: latent networks in Ireland suppressed even the grievance-driven activity that premature rollback would elsewhere have generated. This asymmetry, visible only when all three cases are read together, provides one of the chapter's central contributions to the framework's scope.

Several standard predictors do not resolve the variation across these three cases. Union density offers no leverage: Ireland's density of approximately 22 percent is substantially higher than Australia's 14 percent or New Zealand's 17 percent, yet Ireland produced the steepest decline (Wright et al., 2021; ACTU, 2024; NZCTU, 2024). Macroeconomic conditions do not resolve it: all three experienced comparable inflation peaks, all three saw real wages under pressure in 2022-2023, and none enjoyed macroeconomic conditions materially more favorable than the wave cases. Government

party composition does not resolve it: Australia elected the Albanese Labor government in May 2022, New Zealand had the Ardern and then Hipkins Labour governments through October 2023, and Ireland's center-right coalition maintained strong support for institutional labor relations mechanisms. None of these factors tracks the observed variation. What tracks it is the conjunction of IV1 and IV2 as operationalized in this dissertation.

Collectively, these three cases test the joint necessity of premature economic aid rollback and pre-pandemic network activation. Australia and New Zealand establish that IV1 (economically premature rollback) is a necessary condition for a post-pandemic strike wave: both cases had activated coordination networks (IV2=Activated), yet produced no wave in the absence of IV1. Ireland establishes that IV2 (pre-pandemic activation of coordination networks) is equally necessary: Ireland had premature rollback (IV1=Premature) yet produced no wave because IV2 was absent. Together, and in combination with the Ontario/British Columbia evidence from Chapter IV, these cases support H2's conjunctural claim: neither condition alone is sufficient, and the absence of either is sufficient to prevent a post-pandemic wave.

II. Coding on the Independent Variables.

Economically Premature Rollback of Pandemic-Induced Protections

A case is coded premature rollback where withdrawal of pandemic supports preceded the resolution of the conditions that made those supports necessary. Both of the following conditions must have resolved before rollback can be coded not premature:

condition 1, that real wages had recovered to pre-pandemic levels; and condition 2, that inflation had returned to target ranges.

Australia

Australia's primary pandemic income replacement program was the JobKeeper Payment, an unprecedented wage subsidy covering firms and workers during lockdowns and economic disruption. The scheme's scale was extraordinary: it ultimately covered approximately 4 million employees and cost roughly $89 billion – nearly one-third of the pre-pandemic workforce (ANAO, 2021; Kaine, 2020; Goding, 2022). The rollback date for IV1 coding purposes is March 28, 2021, when JobKeeper expired. The Morrison government did not extend the scheme past its original legislated end date despite continuing COVID-related uncertainty in some states.

At the March 28, 2021 rollback date, the macroeconomic conditions that had warranted the supports had effectively resolved. Condition 1: real wages were modestly positive at approximately +0.4 percent year-over-year at the point of withdrawal (ABS, 2021). Wage growth had not recovered spectacularly, but the trend was positive and real wages had not deteriorated into the negative territory that would signal ongoing income emergency. Condition 1 was met. Condition 2: Australian CPI stood at approximately 1.1 percent at the March 2021 rollback date – below the Reserve Bank of Australia's 2 to 3 percent target band, meaning meaningful inflationary pressure had not yet materialized (ABS, 2021; RBA, 2021). Condition 2 was met. Australia is the only case in this study where both conditions were simultaneously in a favorable zone at the moment of rollback. No other case had even one indicator resolved; Australia had both.

The post-rollback trajectory is analytically important for understanding why Australia's IV1 coding is not premature despite the inflation that subsequently materialized. Australian CPI peaked at 7.8 percent in December 2022, well after JobKeeper's expiry (ABS, 2023). By the time inflation surged, the primary wage subsidy had been withdrawn and an entirely different policy instrument – the Fair Work Commission's annual minimum wage review – had taken effect. The FWC delivered above-inflation minimum wage increases of 2.5 percent in 2021, 5.2 percent in 2022, and 8.65 percent in 2023, maintaining wage floors ahead of price growth in a pre-emptive rather than reactive intervention (Orifici, 2022). The combination of timely rollback and subsequent institutional wage adjustment meant that the acute real wage erosion driving strikes in the UK and US did not materialize in Australia to the same degree or duration.

Both conditions had resolved at the moment of rollback. IV1 coded: Not Premature (ABS, 2021; RBA, 2021).

New Zealand

New Zealand's primary continuous income replacement program was the COVID-19 Income Relief Payment (CIRP), which provided targeted weekly payments to workers who had lost employment as a direct result of COVID-19. The scheme was operationally distinct from the broader COVID-19 Wage Subsidy, which had supported employers to retain staff during lockdowns and was extended in episodic form through successive Delta and Omicron response periods. For IV1 coding purposes, the primary rollback date is November 14, 2020, when the CIRP closed to new applicants after twelve weeks of operation. Final payments to applicants already receiving the CIRP continued

through February 4, 2021; since both dates fall within a period of sub-target inflation and modestly positive real wages, the IV1=Not Premature coding is robust regardless of which date is used. Subsequent wage subsidy extensions are treated as episodic and lockdown-specific – structurally distinct from continuous income replacement – and do not alter the primary rollback coding (Treasury New Zealand, 2024).

At the November 14, 2020 rollback date, macroeconomic conditions had stabilized to a degree that distinguished New Zealand from the premature rollback cases. Condition 1: real wages were modestly positive year-over-year at the point of withdrawal (Stats NZ, 2020). New Zealand's labor market had recovered more quickly than most comparable economies, supported by the government's elimination strategy and the wage subsidy's success in maintaining employment relationships through lockdown periods. Hyslop, Maré, Fabling, Rizzi, and Thirkettle (2023) evaluated the wage subsidy program's outcomes and found it successfully maintained employment relationships during lockdowns, limiting the degree of labor market dislocation that would otherwise have eroded real wages. Condition 1 was met. Condition 2: CPI stood at approximately 1.4 percent at the November 2020 rollback date, within the Reserve Bank of New Zealand's 1 to 3 percent target band (Stats NZ, 2020). Condition 2 was met.

As in Australia, post-rollback inflation in New Zealand subsequently rose significantly, peaking at 7.3 percent in 2022 (Stats NZ, 2022). But the Labour government's wage policy instruments absorbed that pressure through mechanisms other than continued CIRP payments. The Public Sector Pay Adjustment, proposed by the NZCTU in May 2022, applied uniform increases across approximately 150 collective

agreements simultaneously – a bureaucratic mechanism that delivered real wage protection without requiring individual-sector industrial action. The nurses' pay equity settlement of 2023, providing approximately 20 percent increases to address decades of gender-based underpayment, addressed the single most persistent wage grievance in the public sector. These instruments meant that New Zealand workers, like Australian workers, did not face the combination of expired income supports and unaddressed real wage erosion that characterized the premature rollback cases. Both conditions had resolved at the moment of rollback. IV1 coded: Not Premature (Stats NZ, 2020).

Ireland

Ireland's primary continuous income replacement program was the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP), introduced in March 2020 at a flat rate of €350 per week – substantially above the standard Jobseeker's Benefit rate of €203 per week, and one of the most generous pandemic income replacement schemes in Europe. The PUP's design reflected a conscious departure from Ireland's GFC-era austerity approach: where the troika bailout had produced wage cuts and benefit reductions, the pandemic response invested heavily in income protection from the outset. Allen-Coghlan and Varthalitis (2020) systematically contrasted Ireland's two major economic crises, distinguishing the GFC's multiannual fiscal consolidation from the COVID-19 response's immediate large fiscal stimulus. That contrast was deliberate institutional learning.

The PUP was withdrawn through a staged tapering process. The scheme closed to new applicants on July 8, 2021. The first rate reductions took effect on September 14, 2021, when all three payment tiers were simultaneously reduced by €50 (€350→€300,

€300→€250, €250→€203). A second round of reductions followed on November 16, 2021, and the final remaining recipients were transitioned to standard Jobseeker terms on February 8, 2022. For IV1 coding purposes, the material withdrawal is treated as the September 14, 2021 commencement of rate reductions, as this is the point at which income replacement began declining substantively from the pandemic-era level regardless of whether the underlying macroeconomic conditions that warranted it had resolved.

At the September 14, 2021 rollback date, neither condition had resolved. Condition 1: Irish real wages were under increasing pressure as inflation accelerated sharply through the second half of 2021. CPI reached 5.3 percent by December 2021, and the trajectory was unmistakably upward from the moment rate reductions began (CSO, 2022). Real wage growth had not recovered to pre-pandemic levels; nominal wage increases were being outpaced by rising prices before the taper had even completed. The HICP index confirmed that workers' purchasing power was declining at the moment of withdrawal. Condition 1 was not met. Condition 2: at the September 14, 2021 first rate reduction, Irish CPI was above the ECB's 2 percent target and accelerating sharply – moving in the wrong direction at the moment rollback began. By the time the scheme closed to new applicants in July 2021, CPI already stood at approximately 2.2 percent; by September it had risen further, and by February 2022 it had reached 5.7 percent (CSO, 2022). Condition 2 was not met at any point during the taper arc. Ireland's inflation peaked at 9.2 percent in October 2022, the highest sustained rate in the modern CSO

series, developing from the acceleration already underway when supports began to be withdrawn (CSO, 2022; Galpin and De Ruijter, 2023).

The timing of Ireland's rollback relative to economic conditions therefore mirrors the UK and US, not Australia and New Zealand. The government's rationale for the taper was fiscal rather than macroeconomic: as sectors reopened through mid-2021, the PUP's continuation as originally designed was framed as no longer appropriate, with workers returning to employment expected to transition off emergency supports. The framing was one of economic normalization, not of macroeconomic stabilization. But as with the UK and US, normalization of activity did not mean resolution of the price pressures that had originally created the case for income support.

Contemporaneous contestation of the taper's timing was present, though its character – institutional rather than confrontational – itself illuminates the social partnership orientation analyzed in the IV2 section below. As early as June 1, 2021, ICTU General Secretary Patricia King responded to the government's National Resilience and Recovery Plan with an explicit challenge to withdrawal on employer-driven rather than evidence-based grounds: "When and how the PUP is withdrawn must be based on concrete evidence and not on baseless claims from a handful of employers that workers do not want to return to their jobs" (ICTU, 1 June 2021). By November 2021, as the rate reductions were taking effect, King wrote to all ministers and TDs urging them to "strengthen Ireland's threadbare social safety net", describing the flat-rate Jobseeker's Benefit into which PUP recipients were transitioning as inadequate to secure a worker's normal living standards during temporary breaks in employment (The Journal,

15 November 2021). NERI economist Ciarán Nugent, writing on September 30, 2021 – as the taper arc was deepening – challenged the employer narrative that PUP was discouraging work return, noting that 355,000 workers remained unemployed and that the "real unemployment rate will soon reveal itself" as income supports were withdrawn into a rising-price environment (NERI, 30 September 2021). These contestations confirm that credible actors identified the taper's timing as premature in real time. Critically, however, the union response remained characteristically institutional – letter-writing to ministers and TDs, WRC engagement, lobbying for systemic reform – rather than the kind of public-facing industrial opposition that comparable moments produced in the UK and US. This institutional orientation is itself evidence for the IV2=Latent coding.

Neither condition had resolved at the moment of rollback. IV1 coded: Premature (CSO, 2022; Allen-Coghlan and Varthalitis, 2020).

Pre-Pandemic Activation of Labor Movement Coordination Networks

A coding "activated" applies if three conditions are satisfied before March 2020:

- Condition 1, that the coordination brings together workers from more than one distinct world of work – people whose jobs, employers, and the rules governing their employment are genuinely different from each other.
- Condition 2, that the coordination is reaching for something that a contract negotiation could never deliver on its own – a legislative goal, a statutory change, or a policy outcome exceeding the authority of an individual employer at the bargaining table.
- Condition 3, that the coordination produces a public political event that prompts political actors outside the bargaining relationship to respond publicly.

Australia

Australia's labor movement coordination networks were activated before March 2020 through the ACTU's Change the Rules campaign, which ran from 2017 through the 2019 federal election. The campaign constitutes the most substantial pre-pandemic cross-sector labor mobilization in any case in this study outside of Quebec's Common Front.

- Condition 1 (workers from more than one distinct world of work): The Change the Rules campaign produced three successive mass mobilizations in 2018 that together establish cross-sector breadth beyond any reasonable doubt. The May 9, 2018 Melbourne rally drew approximately 60,000 to 120,000 workers from across sectors in the campaign's opening mass mobilization (Peoples Dispatch, 2018). The September 2018 organizing meeting at the Melbourne Convention Centre convened more than 1,700 delegates from 40 unions, with workers from health, construction, education, public service, transport, and manufacturing all represented and voting unanimously to hold an all-unions march (Green Left Weekly, 2018; Peoples Dispatch, 2018). By November 2018, 20 rallies across Australia had attracted 150,000 workers in Melbourne alone across all of these sectors. By April 2019, the campaign had produced nationwide protests in 14 centres. These workers came from genuinely distinct institutional domains: construction workers governed by enterprise agreements under the Fair Work Act; health workers governed by state and federal award structures; university staff governed by institutional enterprise agreements with distinct employers; public servants governed by separate legislative frameworks and APS awards. The diversity of institutional origin is not merely incidental to the claim; it is the claim. Condition 1 is met.

- Condition 2 (goals beyond scope of a contract negotiation): The Change the Rules campaign explicitly targeted legislative reform of the Fair Work Act 2009 itself. Its stated goals – restoration of penalty rates cut by FWC determinations, a living wage, an end to casual work insecurity, overhaul of collective bargaining laws to enable multi-employer agreements, and reversal of the ABCC's powers in the construction sector – were outcomes that required Acts of Parliament (ACTU, 2019). The campaign spent $25 million on the 2019 federal election, targeting 16 specific parliamentary seats and deploying television and radio advertising with the explicit message: "Change the Government to Change the Rules." No individual employer's signature on a collective agreement could restore penalty rates or create sectoral bargaining rights. The goals were legislative by their nature. Condition 2 is met.
- Condition 3 (a public political event prompting a response from political actors outside the bargaining relationship): Prime Minister Scott Morrison and his entire government were compelled to respond publicly to a labor movement campaign that had explicitly framed the 2019 federal election as a referendum on workers' rights. The ACTU's national television advertising campaign forced the Coalition government into sustained public engagement with labor policy questions. Morrison's responses to the campaign – defending the FWC processes, characterizing the ACTU's campaign as politically motivated, and defending penalty rates decisions – constitute precisely the kind of compelled public response by political actors outside the bargaining relationship that Condition 3 requires (ACTU, 2019). The campaign did not produce the electoral outcome the ACTU sought; the Coalition won the May 2019 election. But Condition 3

does not require success; it requires that the coordination produced a public political event forcing political actors to respond. Condition 3 is met.

All conditions are satisfied on sustained evidence from 2017 through 2019, the full pre-pandemic window. Australia's coordination networks were activated through a domestic political cycle culminating in the 2019 federal election campaign. This is a distinct activation pathway from the US (forced by hostile employer opposition) and UK (forced by sustained government austerity), but the three-condition test does not prescribe the pathway – only the observable properties of what activation looks like. IV2 coded: Activated (ACTU, 2019; Green Left Weekly, 2018; Peoples Dispatch, 2018).

Australia's no-wave outcome therefore reflects the absence of IV1, not any deficiency in IV2. The conjunction does not fire because the first condition – premature rollback generating acute wave-level grievance – was not present. That Australia's activated coordination networks were subsequently oriented toward the Albanese government's legislative reform agenda (the Secure Jobs Better Pay Act, Closing Loopholes Acts) rather than toward industrial escalation is consistent with Chapter I's framework: where the grievance trigger is absent, activated networks deploy toward other organizational priorities. The Change the Rules campaign had itself been a legislative strategy; its successor was institutional engagement with a sympathetic Labor government. Neither represents deactivation.

Ireland

Ireland's labor movement coordination networks were latent at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pre-pandemic evidentiary record does not sustain a finding

that the three-condition test was met in any sustained or cross-sector form in the period leading up to March 2020. The most significant pre-pandemic industrial action – the INMO nurses' strike of 2019, the largest strike in Ireland in several decades – illustrates why the latency coding is correct rather than contradicting it.

- Condition 1 (workers from more than one distinct world of work): The 2019 INMO nurses' strike was a dispute within a single sector, with a single employer (the Health Service Executive), involving workers from a single distinct institutional domain. The INMO and the Psychiatric Nurses Association coordinated within the nursing profession, but the dispute did not draw in teachers, bus drivers, construction workers, or public servants. No cross-sector coalition was formed around the nurses' grievances. Other unions did not coordinate sympathetic action. The industrial action, while substantial in scale (involving approximately 40,000 nurses and midwives), remained sectorally contained (RTE, 2019). Condition 1 is not met.
- Condition 2 (goals beyond scope of a contract negotiation): The nurses' demands centered on pay parity with comparable healthcare professions and improved staffing ratios – legitimate grievances, but ones addressed through Labour Court proceedings and the existing public sector pay framework. The Workplace Relations Commission's conciliation processes, the Labour Court's examination of the claims, and the eventual agreement on pay restoration all operated within the normal institutional channels for public sector pay disputes in Ireland. The goals were addressable within the existing bargaining framework; they did not require legislative change or cross-institutional political intervention. Condition 2 is not met.

- Condition 3 (public political event prompts a response from political actors outside the bargaining relationship): Health Minister Simon Harris responded publicly to the nurses' dispute, but in his capacity as the responsible sectoral minister with direct managerial responsibility for the HSE. This is a sectoral response within the normal chain of accountability – the minister responsible for health responding to a health sector dispute – not the kind of cross-institutional political crisis that Condition 3 requires. Condition 3 is not met.

None of the three conditions are satisfied by the 2019 nurses' strike or by any comparable pre-pandemic action. This finding requires a positive account of why Ireland entered the pandemic with latent coordination networks, particularly given that it experienced the most severe GFC of any case in the study and might have been expected to generate activation through that shock. The account is rooted in social partnership.

Ireland operated national tripartite social partnership programmes from 1987 to 2009 – seven successive agreements built around centralized pay agreements, policy concessions, and structured government-union-employer collaboration. As Paolucci and Roche (2024) documented, these agreements embedded union leaders deeply in collaborative relationships with government and employers over more than two decades, creating institutional habits of negotiation and concessionary engagement that proved durable beyond the formal end of partnership itself. When the GFC arrived, and the troika bailout imposed fiscal consolidation amounting to approximately 20 percent of GDP, Ireland's social partnership formation shaped the labor movement's response decisively.

Rather than mounting sustained industrial opposition, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and its major affiliates engaged in concessionary bargaining. The Croke Park Agreement of 2010 accepted significant public sector pay cuts and workforce reductions in exchange for no compulsory redundancies (EJIR, 2015). Senior union leaders explicitly rejected industrial confrontation as a strategic approach. ICTU's response to anti-austerity demonstrations was, in the account of contemporaneous analysis, to call initial demonstrations and then leave the stage – channeling mobilizing energy back into institutional negotiation rather than sustaining it as cross-sector coordination infrastructure (EJIR, 2015). As Culpepper and Regan (2014) argued, Irish unions had nothing credible to offer policymakers in terms of industrial action, having operated as social partners rather than as an oppositional coordination network for more than two decades. The anti-austerity protest that did occur in Ireland remained sporadic and extra-institutional; it did not translate into the activated labor coordination networks that the US and UK developed through their own GFC-era pressures.

The social partnership legacy is analytically significant for what it reveals about institutional persistence. Formal social partnership in Ireland ended in 2009 with the collapse of the Towards 2016 agreement under GFC-imposed fiscal pressures, with the troika's November 2010 bailout precluding any renewal. But the ideological formation it had produced – the WRC-first orientation, the preference for concessionary negotiation over industrial confrontation, the strategic embedding of union leadership in tripartite institutions – did not dissolve with the formal agreements. More than a decade later, in 2021-2024, the patterns of behavior that social partnership had normalized continued to

shape ICTU's approach to post-pandemic industrial relations. The Workplace Relations Commission remained the primary resolution mechanism for disputes that in other countries produced sustained strikes. The industrial peace clause in the Building Momentum agreement (2021-2023) – which initially provided approximately 3 percent in phased increases before being enhanced in August 2022 with a further 6.5 percent supplementary offer – and its successor operated as structural constraints on escalation. Crucially, the unions' willingness to accept such clauses, even when the original offer was modest, reflected a deeper strategic orientation that predated any particular agreement and that the social partnership years had embedded.

None of the three conditions are satisfied within the pre-March 2020 evidentiary window. IV2 coded: Latent (RTE, 2019; EJIR, 2015; Culpepper and Regan, 2014; Paolucci and Roche, 2024).

New Zealand

New Zealand's labor movement coordination networks were activated before March 2020 through a domestic political cycle beginning in 2017-2018, when the election of the Ardern Labour government created both the political conditions and the legislative ambitions that drove a sustained period of cross-sector mobilization. The 2018-2019 strike wave – the largest since the late 1980s by most measures – is the primary evidentiary basis for the activated coding.

- Condition 1 (workers from more than one distinct world of work): In 2018, MBIE recorded 166 stoppages across New Zealand (MBIE, 2024). The official worker count of 11,719 substantially undercounts actual participation – MBIE's methodology records

unique employment relationships rather than individual workers in multi-employer actions, which compresses figures for large public-sector coordinated actions. Jacobin (2019) documents sector-specific participation more directly: approximately 30,000 nurses stopped work under NZNO and approximately 29,000 primary school teachers struck under NZEI in two of the largest 2018 actions alone. Workers involved came from genuinely distinct institutional domains. The public sector actions included nurses governed by the New Zealand Nurses Organisation under DHB employment frameworks; primary and secondary school teachers governed by the Ministry of Education under NZEI Te Riu Roa and PPTA; and government workers governed by the Public Service Act. The quasi-public and private sector actions included bus drivers in Auckland governed by regional council contracts; junior doctors employed by DHBs; airport workers; and cinema, fast food, and retail workers in the private sector under industry-specific employment agreements (NZ Manufacturer, 2019; Jacobin, 2019). The NZCTU's coordination across these sectors, and the contemporaneous framing of the 2018 wave as a connected episode rather than coincidental parallel disputes, satisfies Condition 1 on the most demanding reading. Condition 1 is met.

- Condition 2 (goals beyond scope of a contract negotiation): The CTU's primary legislative objective throughout the 2017-2020 period was the establishment of Fair Pay Agreements – sectoral bargaining legislation that would set industry-wide minimum standards across all workers in a given sector, regardless of union membership. This goal was unambiguously beyond what any individual contract negotiation could achieve: it required an Act of Parliament creating an entirely new bargaining structure, imposing

minimum terms on employers who had never recognized unions, and extending coverage to workers in non-unionized workplaces. The Clark Labour government (1999-2008) had faced sustained CTU pressure for sectoral bargaining and never delivered it across nine years in office, confirming that this was genuinely new political terrain rather than a routine Labour policy priority (American Progress, 2022; NZJER, 2020). Condition 2 is met.

- Condition 3 (public political event prompts a response from political actors outside the bargaining relationship): Both Labour and National were compelled to take explicit public positions on the 2018-2019 strike wave and its political implications. National, then in opposition, publicly engaged with the wave's political implications – challenging the government's fiscal credibility in managing labor expectations and framing the strikes as a consequence of Labour's commitments to workers – a political attribution that acknowledged the strikes as a politically significant event requiring response (Jacobin, 2019). The Ardern government itself was compelled to publicly engage with a strike wave that was challenging its self-imposed Budget Responsibility Rules, creating visible tension between the government's fiscal commitments and its labor-friendly political identity. Prime Minister Ardern's public statements on the nursing strike and the teachers' actions constituted political engagement by the country's head of government – actors clearly outside the immediate bargaining relationship – in response to coordinated labor action. Condition 3 is met.

All three conditions are simultaneously satisfied on evidence from the pre-pandemic period. New Zealand's activation is more recent than Australia's Change the

Rules campaign and is more domestic in its origins than the GFC-driven activation of US and UK networks, but the three-condition test does not require longevity or particular origin pathways. The 2018-2019 wave demonstrated operational cross-sector coordination reaching for legislative goals and producing compelled governmental response before March 2020.

All three conditions satisfied within the pre-March 2020 evidentiary window. IV2 coded: Activated (MBIE, 2024; NZ Manufacturer, 2019; Jacobin, 2019; NZJER, 2020).

New Zealand's non-wave outcome, like Australia's, is therefore explained by the absence of IV1. The conjunction did not fire because premature rollback did not generate the wave-level grievance that would have combined with activated networks to produce a wave. That NZ's activated networks were oriented toward institutional engagement with the Ardern government – the FPA legislative process, pay equity claims, the PSPA mechanism – rather than toward industrial escalation reflects the same dynamic visible in Australia: activated networks deploy toward their most productive available channel, and where that channel is institutional accommodation rather than adversarial mobilization, the observed output is not a wave even in the presence of genuine activation.

Significance of Truth Table Placement

Collectively, the three cases in this chapter demonstrate the necessity of each of the independent variables: if premature rollback or pre-pandemic network activation is missing, a country's post-pandemic strike activity is either not exceptional relative to the decade prior, or not a clean discontinuity from the years immediately preceding the pandemic.

The absence of a robustly exceptional post-pandemic strike wave, however, does not suggest uniform demobilization. Quite the contrary, in fact: Australia demonstrates bounded, contained escalation; New Zealand shows narrowed continuity from 2018-2019 mobilization; and Ireland shows pronounced demobilization. The difference between these outcomes, while not captured in the binary wave/no-wave DV coding, is analytically significant for the account of what activated coordination networks actually do in the absence of wave-level triggering conditions.

III. Case Narratives.

Australia

This chapter describes Australia as a case of containment, but containment is not the same as suppression. Australia continued to record approximately 215 disputes per year across the post-pandemic period, with real disputes producing real outcomes: wage increases, new enterprise agreements, improvements to staffing ratios and working conditions (ABS, 2024). The distinction that matters is between contained institutional conflict and wave-level mobilization. Australia consistently demonstrated the former and did not approach the latter.

Australian public policy offered a series of exhaust valves which avoided the sharpest, most acute edge of economic grievance experienced in the United States and the United Kingdom:

- The Fair Work Commission's pre-emptive wage decisions. As inflation surged to 7.8 percent in December 2022, the FWC delivered above-inflation minimum wage

increases of 5.2 percent in 2022 and 8.65 percent in 2023, maintaining wage floors ahead of price growth for approximately 20 percent of workers directly and influencing broader wage-setting patterns (Orifici, 2022; Clibborn, 2021). Where the UK's public sector pay freeze left workers exposed to 11.1 percent inflation with 4 to 5 percent offers, and Quebec's government offered 9 percent against 18 percent cumulative inflation, Australia's institutional wage-setting mechanism absorbed the primary grievance before disputes could escalate.

- Enterprise bargaining as a resolution channel: disputes moved through protected action ballot procedures, brief tactical actions, and FWC conciliation into negotiated settlements, with the Dnata aviation case providing the clearest illustration.
- The FWC's termination powers, which constrained the duration of disputes where bargaining stalled.

The ACTU's post-2022 strategic orientation reinforced these mechanisms. The election of the Albanese Labor government in May 2022 reoriented the ACTU's activated coordination capacity toward legislative engagement with a sympathetic government: the Secure Jobs Better Pay Act passed in December 2022; the Closing Loopholes Acts followed in 2023 and 2024. Rather than deploying the coordination infrastructure that Change the Rules had built toward industrial escalation, the ACTU invested it in lobbying and parliamentary advocacy for statutory reform. The same organizational capacity that the three-condition IV2 test identifies as activated was deployed in 2022 through 2024 toward the legislative channel rather than the industrial one – precisely because the legislative channel was producing results.

Healthcare: Repeated but Bounded

Healthcare was the sector with the highest repetition of post-pandemic disputes, yet the pattern of action confirms the containment thesis rather than undermining it. Four separate nursing stoppages occurred in New South Wales over four years: February 2022, September 2024, November 2024, and a Western Australian action in November 2022. In each case, the action remained a 24-hour stoppage resolved through institutional bargaining, with nurses seeking pay increases, staffing ratios, and COVID-related conditions. Red Flag (2022a) reported on the February 2022 NSW action: nurses and midwives went on strike across the NSW public health system to secure a pay increase, shift-by-shift staffing ratios, and COVID compensation. Red Flag (2022b) documented the WA action in November 2022, with thousands of nurses rallying at parliament and in regional centers including Broome, Karratha, and Bunbury. The geographic dispersal demonstrated real mobilization capacity. The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Journal (2024) confirmed the continuation of the pattern nearly three years later, with a second 24-hour strike scheduled for November following a September action. Four stoppages over four years in a single sector, none escalating beyond a day's stoppage, represent industrial relations functioning normally rather than a wave.

The non-wage dimension of healthcare grievances is analytically significant. The persistent pursuit of staffing ratios alongside wage claims indicates that post-pandemic healthcare disputes were not purely an inflation response but reflected cumulative workforce pressures that the FWC's minimum wage decisions could only partially

address. This explains why disputes recurred even as wage floors were adjusted: the staffing grievance was structural and not resolved by wage outcomes alone. Yet even this persistent grievance did not produce the sustained escalation toward indefinite campaigns that characterized NHS workers in the United Kingdom during the same period.

Education: Institutional Boundaries on Historic Coordination

The NSW teachers' dispute in 2022 produced what the NSW Teachers Federation described as a historic joint meeting between public and Catholic school teacher unions, culminating in a decision to take 24-hour joint strike action on June 30 (NSW Teachers Federation, 2022). Solidarity Online (2022) reported that teachers took strike action for the second time in five months in May 2022, with more than 15,000 marching on Parliament House. The Canberra Daily (2022) documented the impact: the NSW Education Department listed 259 schools as not operating, with thousands of teachers marching up Macquarie Street. The Catholic Weekly (2022) noted that teacher burnout, staff shortages, and the ongoing pressures of COVID-19 had driven Catholic teachers to strike twice in two months, joining with the NSW Teachers Federation on June 30. The Guardian (2021) had captured the broader context a year earlier: for the first time in nearly a decade, thousands of striking teachers converged on NSW Parliament, calling on the government to address heavy workloads, uncompetitive salaries, and staff shortages.

What is striking about this sequence is precisely what it did not produce. A historic joint meeting of public and Catholic school teachers produced a single 24-hour stoppage rather than an extended campaign. Three strikes in roughly six weeks produced enterprise agreement negotiations rather than cross-sector escalation. The institutional

architecture that contained the Australian response was the enterprise bargaining framework: disputes were directed toward specific employer negotiations, the FWC wage decisions had addressed the salary floor, and the legal framework provided no mechanism for the kind of political general strike or cross-sector sympathy action that would transform bounded sector disputes into a wave.

Sector Spread Without Escalation

A defining feature of Australia's 2021-2024 post-pandemic record is that industrial action reached sectors with little or no prior strike history without producing the cross-sector coordination that wave classification requires. The Retail and Fast Food Workers Union documented what it characterized as the Coles Superstrike in 2023-2024 – described as unprecedented in Australian retail history, with over 12,000 workers voting against a proposed deal (RAFFWU, 2023-2024). The Mining and Energy Union commenced protected industrial action at the Kogan Creek power station in September 2023, bringing a significant industrial dispute into electricity generation for the first time in years (Mining and Energy Union, 2023). The United Workers Union announced Australia's first-ever fast-food worker strike in October 2024, when members at a Grill'd restaurant in Melbourne took a 12-hour action drawing attention to the widespread use of government-subsidised traineeships – the superlative framing confirming that organized industrial action was reaching terrain it had not previously touched (United Workers Union, 2024). The Police Association of NSW announced that from June 30, 2023, NSW police officers would cease cooperation with Commonwealth agencies and departments unless a risk to a person's life was involved – industrial action in law enforcement, a

sector with essentially no post-war strike precedent in Australia (PANSW, 2023). Each of these actions was noteworthy precisely because of the sector it occurred in. None produced cross-sector coordination. None involved ACTU-orchestrated solidarity. None escalated beyond sector-specific enterprise bargaining demands. The activated coordination networks that the Change the Rules campaign had built were reaching new organizational terrain by 2023-2024 – but the enterprise bargaining architecture ensured that each new sector's disputes remained institutionally isolated from every other.

Transport and Logistics: Containment Across Multiple Sectors and Years

The transport and logistics sector demonstrated sustained dispute activity from 2021 through 2024, yet every significant action remained resolved through enterprise bargaining or FWC intervention without producing cross-sector escalation. The 2021 cluster established the pattern. The Business and Human Rights Resource Centre (2021) reported that up to 2,000 StarTrack employees walked off the job at midnight in a dispute over job security and pay – the Transport Workers Union stating this constituted approximately 70 percent of the total StarTrack workforce. The Shipping Gazette (2021) documented parallel pressure in maritime logistics, with Australian dockers threatening immediate nationwide work stoppages at Patrick Terminals, which handle approximately 40 percent of Australia's container throughput. Both disputes remained bounded and resolved without escalation into cross-union solidarity action.

The Dnata aviation case exemplifies the rapid enterprise bargaining resolution dynamic. The New Daily (2022) reported preparation for a 24-hour strike by ground handlers contracted to Qantas and other airlines. Within days, the Transport Workers

Union (2022) announced that ground handling workers at Dnata had called off the planned action, locking in job security provisions and 17 percent pay increases over four years. The cycle from strike announcement to settlement in four days demonstrates how enterprise bargaining channeled disputes into tactical actions followed by substantive outcomes.

The NSW rail dispute illustrates FWC legal containment. 2GB (2022) detailed planned action including bans on transport officers issuing fines, a strike in area one, and bans on operating foreign-made trains. The World Socialist Web Site (2022) reported on execution: the first action, a six-hour stoppage affecting only the T4 Eastern Suburbs and Illawarra Line, proceeded on August 10. By December 2024, FWC intervention terminated remaining rail action, with the union concluding they would likely lose any further action for a period of time (World Socialist Web Site, 2024). The dispute ran for over two years but remained contained to specific operational restrictions rather than escalating into full system-wide stoppages, and was ultimately ended by legal intervention rather than resolution of the underlying grievances.

The DP World/MUA maritime dispute across 2023 and 2024 illustrates the outer limit of containment: extended action reducing terminal capacity by 35.7 percent weekly according to the Australian Logistics Council (2024), with rolling work stoppages at Sydney, Melbourne, Fremantle, and Brisbane terminals documented by Tomax Logistics Australia (2023). This was the closest Australia came to a dispute with wave-level economic disruption potential. Yet the dispute remained confined to specific terminals without triggering port-wide shutdowns, and was ultimately resolved through enterprise

bargaining without producing the cross-sector solidarity or political general strike response that wave classification would require.

Beyond maritime, transport and logistics disputes extended to road and distribution sectors through 2023 and 2024 without producing escalation. Australasian Bus and Coach (2023) reported Gold Coast bus drivers taking a 24-hour strike for fair pay and safe working conditions – a Queensland transport dispute that ran its course through sector-specific enterprise bargaining rather than triggering inter-union solidarity. The New Daily (2024) documented 500 Qantas engineers walking off the job across Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth, and Adelaide airports for 24 hours in December 2024, extending the aviation containment pattern that Dnata had established two years earlier to the final weeks of the study period. Wyndham TV (2024) reported approximately 1,500 Woolworths warehouse workers across four Melbourne distribution centres initiating an indefinite strike in November 2024 – the language of indefinite authorization marking the most formally open-ended action in the transport and logistics record, yet one that remained within enterprise bargaining resolution channels without triggering cross-sector solidarity. The word “indefinite” is analytically significant: it demonstrates that workers could authorize open-ended action without the Fair Work Act’s architecture failing to resolve it at the enterprise level, and without the action spreading beyond the specific employment relationship.

The Containment Pattern in Aggregate

The post-pandemic record in Australia is one of sector-specific, institutionally contained disputes that produced genuine outcomes while never approaching the

sustained cross-sector escalation that constitutes a wave. Nurses struck four times over four years; teachers struck three times in 2022 alone; transport workers engaged in disputes ranging from four days to 14 months. Yet each action remained time-limited, sector-specific, and resolved through the institutional mechanisms the Fair Work Act provides. No evidence emerged of cross-sector coordination, no sustained indefinite campaigns, and no ACTU-led nationwide political stoppages.

The comparison to Australia's own recent history establishes the containment claim empirically. The 2022 peak of 196,800 WDL is 28 percent below the 2012 peak of 273,200, and substantially below the 2011 figure of 241,500. Australia in 2022 was not experiencing a unique post-pandemic wave; it was experiencing activity levels that had been surpassed in the first half of the prior decade. The 2018 and 2019 years, rather than the pre-pandemic norm, were anomalies – a historically depressed trough that makes the post-pandemic recovery appear more dramatic than it is when measured against the full prior-decade context. The 2010-2017 average WDL was approximately 150,000, substantially above both the 2018-2019 trough and the post-pandemic average, confirming that recovery rather than escalation is the correct characterization. Relative to the US, UK, and Quebec, whose 2022 and 2023 figures exceeded prior decade peaks by substantial margins, Australia's activity represents normal industrial relations functioning within a contained institutional framework.

Ireland: Social Partnership Demobilization – Or Strategic Restraint?

Unlike Australia or New Zealand, both of which experienced some form of strike escalation without clearing the bar for a strike wave, Ireland's experience is qualitatively

different: demobilization, an exceptional decrease in strike activity to the lowest levels in the modern Irish industrial relations record.

The demobilization is analytically significant given public policy configuration. Non-escalation is an expected result where IV1 is absent: no wave-level grievance is generated, and activated networks produce normal institutional pressure rather than exceptional mobilization. Ireland, however, is a different phenomenon: IV1 is present, providing a believable trigger for widespread economic grievance, but the labor movement's response is to reduce industrial conflict below pre-pandemic baselines rather than to escalate.

Ireland's workers faced the same inflation trajectory as their UK counterparts: CPI peaked at 9.2 percent in October 2022 (CSO, 2022), but the Irish response to that inflationary shock was not the sustained NHS and public transport campaigns that characterized the UK, nor even the contained institutional disputes of Australia. It was, on the evidence of the CSO data, the lowest sustained level of industrial action in the modern record.

The Social Partnership Mechanism in Operation

The mechanism that produced this outcome is traceable through the institutional channels that absorbed labor movement energy during the post-pandemic period. Building Momentum – A New Public Service Agreement 2021-2022, was agreed in December 2020 and ratified by unions in February 2021 (RTÉ, 23 February 2021). The original agreement provided approximately 3 percent in phased general round increases: 1 percent (or €500, whichever was greater) from October 1, 2021; 1 percent through a

sectoral bargaining fund from February 1, 2022; and a further 1 percent from October 1, 2022 (Forsa, 2021; Government of Ireland, 2021). These increases were weighted toward lower-paid workers through the €500 floor. The agreement also contained an industrial peace clause requiring unions to maintain industrial peace and comply with a new dispute resolution process as a condition of accessing its benefits (RTÉ, 23 February 2021).

In August 2022, with inflation reaching 9.2 percent and the original agreement's pay terms widely acknowledged as inadequate to the inflationary environment, negotiations concluded on an enhanced extension adding 6.5 percent in additional increases – 3 percent backdated to February 2022, 2 percent in March 2023, and 1.5 percent in October 2023 – explicitly described by SIPTU Health as coming "on top of existing Building Momentum pay adjustments" (SIPTU Health, 2022; Minister McGrath, 1 October 2022).

Crucially, the social partnership demobilization argument is not weakened but strengthened by this sequence: the industrial peace clause held even when the original pay offer of approximately 3 percent was modest – far below the inflation rate that would materialize – demonstrating that the willingness to accept it reflected a deep strategic orientation toward concessionary engagement rather than a calculation that the offer was sufficient

As Kennelly et al. (2020) had documented, Irish social partners including ICTU had been active participants in shaping emergency pandemic policy from the outset; the transition from emergency policy engagement to Building Momentum negotiations followed the institutional logic that social partnership habits had normalized. The

National Economic and Social Council (2022) documented how a revived form of tripartite policy interaction through the Labour Employer Economic Forum enabled unions, employers, and government to negotiate pandemic responses collaboratively. That engagement structure was the successor to formal social partnership: its organizational form was different, but the behavioral pattern – union leadership embedded in collaborative negotiation with government and employers – was continuous.

The Building Momentum framework covered the public sector, which employs approximately 400,000 workers and constitutes the most heavily unionized segment of the Irish economy. By removing this sector from the potential pool of industrial action through the industrial peace clause, the agreement structurally constrained the maximum observable strike activity. Its successor, a multi-year Public Service Agreement extending the framework through 2026, provided further percentage increases across the public sector (the precise total value requires verification against the Department of Public Expenditure published agreement before submission). These agreements did not merely offer workers wages in exchange for industrial peace; they drew union leaders into the negotiating architecture itself, reproducing the embeddedness in collaborative state-mediated processes that social partnership had institutionalized.

The Threat-Without-Execution Pattern

The clearest evidence that the mechanism was social partnership orientation rather than absence of grievance is the pattern of authorized but unexecuted industrial action across the 2021-2024 period. Workers balloted for and authorized industrial action repeatedly; strikes rarely materialized. Of approximately seven ballot authorizations or

threatened strikes in 2021, only one brief action occurred – a 24-hour IWU strike over the outsourcing of members' work (Irish Times, 23 April 2021) – representing an execution rate of approximately 14 percent. The pattern persisted through 2022 and 2023. The Irish Times (2021a) reported Bus Éireann drivers deferring strike action after a breakthrough in talks. The Journal (2021a) documented school secretaries' action deferred after significant concessions by the Department of Education. The Journal (2021b) reported that student nurses and midwives were to be balloted on industrial action; no strike subsequently occurred. The Journal (2021c) documented Irish Rail workers who backed the use of industrial action over what they described as downright thuggery on trains; no strike materialized despite the authorization. The Irish Times (2021b) reported local authority staff balloting for strike action in a pay dispute; no strike subsequently occurred. This last instance is notable: local government represents one of the most unionized and organizationally capable segments of the Irish workforce, yet even there the authorization-without-execution pattern held.

This pattern – grievance present, ballot authorized, strike averted through institutional intervention – is the operational signature of a labor movement whose strategic default is WRC and Labour Court engagement rather than industrial escalation. The execution rate of approximately 20 to 25 percent across the full period is the author's estimate derived from media coverage of ballot authorizations and strike threats in the period; it is subject to the inherent limitations of news-based counts, including selection bias toward newsworthy threats, and should be read as an indicative order of magnitude rather than a precise statistic. That said, it quantifies what the social partnership account

predicts qualitatively: that organized labor in Ireland channels grievance into institutional resolution processes at the first available opportunity, even when that opportunity requires accepting something less than original demands. The Journal (2022a) captured this orientation in its framing of the medical scientists' dispute, with workers stating that strike action was their last resort. RTÉ News (2021b) reported Tesco Ireland staff in Kerry voting for industrial action – no significant strike subsequently emerged, another instance of the authorization-without-execution pattern. The Irish Independent (2021a) documented Fórsa members in the Valuation Tribunal taking strike action, while RTÉ (2021a) noted Shannon Airport police and fire services voting on industrial action – neither producing significant sustained stops. In a system shaped by two decades of partnership ideology, the last resort follows a long queue of institutional attempts.

The Medical Scientists Campaign (2022): The Outer Limit

The medical scientists' dispute represents the most sustained industrial action in Ireland during the post-pandemic period, which makes it instructive precisely because of how little it amounted to. The Irish Examiner (2022a) reported in March 2022: a strike by frustrated medical scientists was set to disrupt hospital laboratory testing. The Journal (2022c) provided context: they felt forgotten, with disruption to GP and hospital lab tests as medical scientists struck. The Journal (2022a) stated the medical scientists' position: they had to take action, with strike described explicitly as a last resort by workers seeking pay parity. The Irish Times (2022) then reported that medical scientists had cancelled a planned strike after Labour Court intervention – with the cancellation occurring on the same day as Labour Court engagement. The Journal (2022b) subsequently documented

that medical scientists would suspend strike action and return to WRC for talks. The Journal (2022d) noted a brief intensification before suspension: medical scientists were to take two more days of industrial action before returning to WRC.

Total strike days in the medical scientists campaign amounted to approximately four to five across March through May 2022. The cost-of-living dimension of post-pandemic Irish grievances is visible in the community and voluntary care sector, which demonstrated legitimate grievances producing limited action. The Journal (2022e) reported SIPTU members in the Irish Wheelchair Association voting to strike in a pay dispute. The Irish Times (2022) documented the action, with Irish Wheelchair Association members striking from care centres. The Journal (2022f) framed the dispute in terms of the cost-of-living crisis. The Journal (2022g) subsequently noted that care and community workers filled gaps left by the state and needed a pay rise – structural grievances persisting without producing escalation. The Irish Times (2023a) later reported that talks on pay increases for voluntary-sector health workers had collapsed, yet no major sustained strikes emerged despite the institutional process stalling. Even the Debenhams workers' dispute – in which The Journal (2021e) reported a 91 percent rejection of a Labour Court proposal – ultimately resolved through an institutional training fund rather than indefinite escalation. By comparison, UK NHS workers engaged in sustained strikes over many months during the same period, while Australian nurses struck multiple times across different states.

The Firefighters Dispute (2023): National Threat, Zero Strike Days

The retained firefighters dispute in 2023 illustrates the social partnership mechanism at its most effective and provides the sharpest available contrast with how comparable disputes resolved in wave cases. Newstalk (2023) reported the severity of the threat: a SIPTU retained firefighter strike could see half of fire stations across Ireland close. The potential closure of 50 percent of national fire stations would have constituted a public safety emergency of a kind that, in the United Kingdom, would have produced sustained public pressure and extensive strike activity. Clare Herald (2023) documented direct ministerial engagement: the Minister issued a statement on the Retained Fire Service, with government intervening not as a neutral arbiter but as an active participant. Breaking News (2023) subsequently reported that retained firefighters had suspended industrial action. The timeline from threat announcement in June through ministerial engagement in July to suspension in August totaled approximately two months, producing zero strike days despite the scale of the threatened disruption. The bus transport sector showed the same resolution logic: Dublin Live (2023) reported that SIPTU Go-Ahead bus drivers planned a two-day strike over a pay dispute, before The Journal (2023a) announced that the planned stoppages had been suspended before execution – again, threatened action absorbed by pre-emptive institutional engagement.

One genuine exception to the threat-without-execution pattern deserves acknowledgment: The Irish Times (2023b) reported a three-day strike by water services workers that prompted boil-water notices across Waterford, Tipperary, and Cork. This localized utilities dispute produced actual sustained stoppages rather than pre-emptive

resolution, and stands as the single clearest counterexample to the broader pattern. Its geographic containment – regional rather than national – and its brevity – three days rather than the multi-month campaigns that characterized UK equivalents – confirm rather than refute the characterization of Irish industrial conflict as institutionally bounded. Even the exception remained within the containment logic.

The private sector exhibited a qualitatively different version of restraint: not threat-without-execution but threat-without-authorization. Irish Examiner (2022b) reported that industrial action loomed at Apple in Cork after a pay deal was rejected – language of imminence rather than occurrence, capturing the characteristic gap between grievance and action. The Journal (2022h) documented concerns among trade unionists that Amazon workers in Ireland faced the threat of dismissal if they joined strike action – illustrating how union power in Ireland's non-partnership private sector operates under a fundamentally different power asymmetry than in the tripartite-protected public sector. Irish Examiner (2021) reported the most direct illustration of union limits outside institutional structures: construction sites continued to operate during the pandemic despite union calls for closure, with employers simply ignoring the union position. Irish Independent (2021b) reported crane operators at Liebherr in Killarney voting for industrial action – a localized manufacturing dispute that did not escalate into sustained action. The contrast between these private sector outcomes and the public sector pattern reinforces the social partnership account: institutional protection is what converts grievance into credible threat, and that protection was structurally absent in non-unionized and non-partnership private sector settings.

The contrast with comparable disputes in wave cases is not incidental but mechanistic. In the UK, the 2022-2023 dispute cycle involved sustained NHS and rail strikes running for months without government resolution precisely because the government's strategic posture was to hold firm rather than to engage in the kind of active political mediation that Ireland's social partnership legacy normalized. Irish policymakers, union leaders, and employers all operated within an institutional culture in which tripartite negotiation before escalation is the expected outcome, not the exception. That culture outlasted the formal social partnership agreements that had produced it.

Social Partnership Stickiness: Why Habits Outlast Structures

Ireland's social partnership formally ended with the collapse of the Towards 2016 agreement in 2009 and the government's decision, under troika pressure, not to renew it. By 2021, formal social partnership had been absent from Irish industrial relations for over a decade. Yet the behavioral patterns it had produced – the WRC-first orientation, the preference for concessionary negotiation, the embeddedness of union leadership in tripartite institutional dialogue, the treatment of strikes as last resorts to be avoided through pre-emptive institutional engagement – were demonstrably still shaping ICTU's strategic approach throughout the post-pandemic period.

This persistence is consistent with what the institutional persistence literature describes as path dependence: the tendency for prior organizational choices to constrain subsequent ones by raising the costs of deviation and creating self-reinforcing behavioral expectations (Pierson, 2000). Mahoney and Thelen (2015) document how institutional change is frequently gradual and incomplete rather than punctuated, with prior forms

persisting in modified or residual configurations even after formal structures have been dismantled. The Irish case illustrates this dynamic at the organizational-behavioral level rather than the formal-institutional level: what persisted was not a set of rules or agreements but a set of strategic orientations, negotiating reflexes, and institutional habits embedded in the union leadership cohort that had operated within social partnership for two decades. As Paolucci and Roche (2024) document in their analysis of Irish labor relations after the partnership era, coordination in Ireland has not disappeared but has been reorganized through informal and residual channels that reproduce many of social partnership's practical features without its formal architecture.

The implication for the broader argument is that IV2=Latent in Ireland is not simply a description of the absence of cross-sector mobilization; it is a positive description of an organizational orientation that actively channeled grievance away from industrial action and toward institutional resolution. That orientation was produced by over two decades of social partnership practice and was sufficiently durable to survive the formal dissolution of the structures that had created it. Ireland therefore entered the post-pandemic period not merely lacking activated coordination networks but possessing organizational habits whose net effect on industrial conflict was demobilizing – converting the grievance that premature rollback generated into institutional negotiation rather than strike escalation.

New Zealand: Continuity, Shifting Tactics – and a 2025 Wave?

New Zealand's post-pandemic labor relations present three analytically distinct sub-narratives. The first concerns the pre-pandemic mobilization that established the

baseline: the 2018-2019 strike wave, driven by the election of the Ardern Labour government and the CTU's legislative ambitions, produced the elevated trajectory from which no post-pandemic disjuncture has emerged. The second concerns the tactic shift that accounts for the anomalous 2022 person-days-lost figure without constituting wave escalation: the transition from frequent, brief, sector-specific stoppages to fewer, longer, more concentrated disputes. The third concerns why 2025 finally produced the conditions for a genuine wave: the National-ACT coalition's reversal of Labour-era institutional accommodations that had channeled union energy away from industrial confrontation.

2018-2019 Pre-Pandemic Mobilization

New Zealand's labor movement had been in an activated, escalating state for two years before COVID-19 arrived. Wright and McLaughlin (2021) documented a marked increase in work stoppages in New Zealand since 2018, particularly in the public sector during the pre-pandemic period. MBIE recorded 166 stoppages in 2018 and 143 in 2019 – the two highest figures in the series (MBIE, 2024). The official worker count for 2018 was 11,719, but MBIE's methodology substantially undercounts actual participation by recording unique employment relationships rather than individual workers in multi-employer actions. Sector-specific counts provide a more accurate picture: approximately 30,000 nurses struck under NZNO and approximately 29,000 primary school teachers under NZEI in two of the largest 2018 actions alone (Jacobin, 2019). The 2018 mobilization also included the first joint primary and secondary school teachers' strike in decades under NZEI and PPTA combined coordination; bus drivers, airport workers, cinema workers, and junior doctors; and a variety of private sector actions. Parker and

Alakavuklar (2023) analyzed this period as representing union collective action and social movement unionism, with strikes deployed strategically to rebuild power and demonstrate mobilization capacity.

The CTU's legislative objective throughout this period was the establishment of Fair Pay Agreements, a sectoral bargaining framework that required an Act of Parliament and therefore exceeded what any contract negotiation could deliver. The 2018-2019 mobilization was not merely an expression of worker grievance; it was a demonstration of coordination capacity aimed at strengthening the CTU's legislative leverage with the newly elected Labour government. Both Labour and National were compelled to take public positions on the strike wave: National explicitly attributed the escalation to Labour's having raised workers' expectations beyond what the government could deliver within its Budget Responsibility Rules, while the Ardern government itself was forced to engage publicly with a wave challenging its own fiscal commitments (Jacobin, 2019). These are precisely the observable indicators that Condition 3 of the IV2 test requires.

By March 2020, New Zealand's coordination networks were operationally active and had been continuously exercised across 2018-2019. The pandemic arrived into an activated labor movement, not a dormant one. The question that the post-pandemic DV pattern raises is not why no wave occurred given latent networks, but why the elevated 2018-2019 trajectory did not continue to escalate when post-pandemic macroeconomic conditions added inflationary pressure to pre-existing mobilization momentum. The answer runs through the Ardern government's institutional accommodations.

Tactic Shift Under Labour

The Ardern government's response to the 2018-2019 wave was substantive institutional accommodation rather than resistance. The wage subsidy scheme maintained employment relationships through lockdowns. The Public Sector Pay Adjustment, proposed in May 2022, provided 7 percent increases across approximately 150 collective agreements simultaneously – a bureaucratic mechanism that removed the wage grievance from individual-sector negotiations without requiring sector-by-sector strike campaigns. The nurses' pay equity settlement of 2023 provided approximately 20 percent increases addressing decades of gender-based underpayment; when NZNO announced 35,000 nurses would walk off the job in 2023, 1News (2023a) reported the strike announcement, before RNZ (2023a) reported that nurses had accepted the pay offer from Te Whatu Ora and called off the strike on a close vote. The pattern – strike threat announced, substantive offer made, action cancelled – is the mirror image of Ireland's threat-without-execution dynamic and demonstrates a different mechanism: an activated labor movement exercising its demonstrated capacity for threat and achieving institutional responsiveness, rather than a latent movement whose threats are absorbed through WRC processes because there is no credible industrial escalation behind them.

The NZCTU's strategic orientation during the Labour government period was firmly toward institutional engagement with a sympathetic government, particularly through the Fair Pay Agreements legislative process. The Fair Pay Agreements Working Group, established in 2018, conducted five years of consultation before the Act passed in December 2022. During this extended institutional engagement, the CTU's

organizational bandwidth was oriented toward legislative advocacy rather than industrial escalation. This is not deactivation; it is an activated network deploying toward its most productive available channel. The FPA process held out the prospect of legally mandating sectoral bargaining across entire industries – an outcome of far greater magnitude than any strike campaign could produce for individual sectors. Pursuing that outcome through the legislative channel was rational given the political opportunity the Ardern government represented.

The consequence for strike patterns was a shift in form rather than an absence of conflict. Annual stoppages fell from a 2018-2019 average of 154.5 to a 2021-2024 average of 40.0, a 74 percent decline. Workers involved fell from 27,875 to 20,101 per year, a 28 percent decline (MBIE, 2024). Both figures confirm that the post-pandemic period was not escalating beyond 2018-2019 levels on the metrics most directly measuring mobilization breadth. What changed was duration and concentration: the 2022 person-days-lost figure of 302,948 reflects extended disputes by relatively small groups rather than broad simultaneous mobilization. The firefighters' dispute in 2022 illustrates this dynamic precisely. NZ Herald (2022a) reported regional firefighter participation, with NZPFU members across the country joining the first national firefighter strike in New Zealand's history. The Otago Daily Times (2022a) captured the systemic character of the grievance: the dispute was "about more than just money," with firefighters arguing the service was critically under-resourced. The Otago Daily Times (2022b) documented the human dimension: the oldest and youngest firefighters joined the picket line alike, describing themselves as loving the job but not the management, with low starting wages

identified as a barrier that prevented the recruitment the service urgently needed – people just need a living wage. RNZ (2022b) documented firefighters calling off further strikes after agreeing to enter facilitated mediation, and the NZ Herald (2022b) confirmed firefighters returning to full duties after the offer was ratified for that bargaining round. The dispute involving approximately 2,000 NZPFU members contributed disproportionately to the 2022 PDL anomaly without constituting wave-level mobilization: it was a single-sector dispute that ran for several months through mediation and agreement rather than escalating into cross-sector solidarity. Fire and Safety Journal reporting from early 2026 confirms that NZPFU–FENZ negotiations continued into subsequent bargaining rounds, underlining that the 2022 resolution was round-specific rather than a final settlement.

Healthcare disputes followed a similar pattern of threat, partial action, and resolution. The 2021 nurse dispute established the Labour-era dynamic most clearly. RNZ (2021a) documented the grassroots character of the grievance, with Rotorua nurses describing burnout, understaffing, and the accumulated cost of staying late to protect patients they cared about. The Otago Daily Times (2021) confirmed the scale: approximately 30,000 nurses struck for better conditions, with nurses framing the action as what they needed to pass something on to the next generation. NZ Herald (2021a) reported that nurses voted for strike action across July, August, and September – successive ballot rounds confirming sustained mobilization pressure. Kaitiaki Nursing New Zealand (2021) documented that members voted for three further strike dates, with union managers acknowledging that those who continued to work during strike days were

as much part of the action as those who walked out – an unusual framing that reveals the organizational tension between maintaining safe staffing and exercising industrial leverage. The dispute ran through multiple rounds without escalating into indefinite action, resolved through negotiation rather than sustained escalation. RNZ (2022a) documented community nurses striking for four hours across the country demanding pay parity with hospital nurses, with the 20 percent pay gap between community and hospital nurses representing a structural inequality that produced episodic action even during the relatively contained 2022 period. When doctors entered the dispute landscape in 2023, RNZ (2023b) reported the first ASMS strike – a two-hour stoppage involving 5,000 senior doctors and dentists, the first ASMS strike on record. RNZ (2023c) documented a third doctors' strike, with participants describing conditions as "utterly demoralising" and citing progressive deterioration of public hospitals, a 400 percent wait list increase, a $100,000 pay gap with Australia, and a 1,700 doctor shortage. Resolution followed the same pattern: RNZ (2023d) reported that hospital dentists and doctors called off a planned fourth strike after positive movement in negotiations.

Education disputes were anchored by the teachers' sequence in 2023. 1News (2023b) reported teachers nationwide taking to the streets in what was described as the largest education strike since May 2019 – the explicit framing against the 2019 peak confirming that the post-pandemic period was being measured against, and failing to exceed, the pre-pandemic baseline. The Spinoff (2023) reported on secondary teachers striking for the second time, with 20,000 PPTA members, 300,000 students affected, and rolling strikes planned for Term 2. NZEI Te Riu Roa (2023) announced area school

teachers joining rolling strike action covering the South Island and both North Island regions, with a relief teacher ban and meeting ban supplementing work stoppages. These actions generated significant disruption while remaining sectorally contained – no sympathy action from other unions, no NZCTU-called joint stoppages, no escalation beyond the education sector.

The Labour-era resolution pattern is distinct from Ireland's but produces the same non-wave outcome. Ireland's social partnership-derived latency meant that threats were resolved before execution through WRC intervention, with an execution rate of approximately 14 to 25 percent. New Zealand's Labour-era pattern was different: disputes were executed, brief actions occurred, and government movement then produced settlement. RNZ (2023a) reported nurses accepting their pay offer and cancelling a planned strike on a close vote. RNZ (2023d) reported doctors calling off a planned fourth strike after positive movement. The NZ Herald (2022b) confirmed firefighters returning to full duties after months of action. The resolution occurred after, not before, industrial action, but the settlements were substantive enough to achieve narrow worker approval – indicating genuine government responsiveness rather than coercive containment.

Did 2025 Trigger a Wave?

The pattern that prevailed under Labour – activated networks channeled toward institutional engagement with a sympathetic government, producing the tactic shift toward fewer longer disputes and the 2022 PDL anomaly – depended entirely on that institutional channel remaining available and productive. When the National-ACT

coalition took office in October 2023 and began systematically closing those channels, the conditions for a wave rapidly materialized.

The Fair Pay Agreements Repeal Act received Royal Assent on December 19, 2023, thirteen months after the FPA Act's own enactment and before any Fair Pay Agreements had been finalized. Minister for Workplace Relations Brooke van Velden made the government's intent explicit: the fair pay agreement system was to stop, with all bargaining processes to cease (van Velden, 2023). The Equal Pay Amendment Act of May 2025, passed under urgency without select committee review, raised the threshold for female-dominated work from 60 percent to 70 percent and cancelled 33 existing pay equity claims covering at least 150,000 workers. Prime Minister Luxon acknowledged the fiscal motivation: it could save the government billions of dollars (Luxon, 2025). Public sector workforce cuts eliminated over 4,000 positions. These policy reversals removed the institutional channels through which unions had advanced members' interests without industrial action during the Labour years.

The transition from Labour to National accelerated through 2024 in a pattern that the article citations document with precision. NZ Herald (2024a) reported that half the country's junior doctors were striking for 25 hours over pay cuts in real terms – the framing of pay as declining rather than merely inadequate marking a qualitative shift from the 2021-2023 language of insufficient increases. NZ Herald (2024b) reported junior doctors striking for a second time within two weeks – escalation within a single sector that the Labour government had never permitted to reach. RNZ (2024a) captured the emotional register of St John ambulance workers' strike with language absent from

any 2021-2023 coverage: workers described themselves as “so united, so angry.” RNZ (2024b) documented thousands of Woolworths supermarket workers striking – the private sector now joining public sector mobilization, a cross-sector signal the Labour years had not produced. NZ Herald (2024c) reported 36,000 nurses striking nationwide after what they described as a “distressing” pay offer – the word distressing carrying a different affective weight than the disappointment or inadequacy language of previous rounds. The 2024 trajectory was not yet a wave by the dissertation’s two-criterion definition, but it was the corridor through which wave conditions would rapidly materialize.

The NZCTU’s Fight Back Together campaign, launched through a nationwide Maranga Ake hui convened by the NZCTU in October 2024, provided the organizational infrastructure for cross-sector coordination that had been absent throughout 2021-2024. The organizational commitment was established and firm well before the October 23 date: Kaitiaki Nursing New Zealand (2025a) reported on October 2 that the NZNO ballot had closed with a decisive result, with Auckland delegate Liandra Conradie stating that nurses were going to stand strong because safe staffing was too big an issue to back down on. The Spinoff (2025) previewed the action on October 21, two days before the event, with PSA national secretary Fleur Fitzsimons confirming that 16,750 PSA members had already committed to strike action on October 23 and that further workers might yet join them. RNZ (2025c) previewed the event with NZCTU President Richard Wagstaff prominently featured. On October 23, 2025, approximately 100,000 public sector workers struck simultaneously across five sectors: teachers under NZEI and PPTA, nurses under

NZNO, senior doctors under ASMS, firefighters under NZPFU, and public service workers under the PSA. Labor Notes (2025) characterized it as the largest strike since 1979 and described it as a defining moment in our history. RNZ (2025b) confirmed the historical framing, documenting 22 or more official work stoppages in 2025 and comparing the action to the 1951 waterfront dispute and 1979 general strike. 1News (2025b) covered the day-of action with tens of thousands walking off the job and rallying in marches across the country. Kaitiaki Nursing New Zealand (2025b) documented the multi-regional scale from the ground: Auckland saw over 23,000 participants and what the same Auckland delegate described as the biggest march down Queen Street in years; Palmerston North and Whanganui each drew over 1,000; Kaitaia drew approximately 300; Dunedin, Invercargill, and Balclutha held indoor rallies after red weather warnings forced venue changes. A Palmerston North nurse, reflecting on the day, stated that she was proud to be a nurse standing with teachers, doctors, and others. NZNO (2025) confirmed that corrections nurses and healthcare assistants joined the October 23 strike, extending participation into sectors – prison healthcare – that had never previously participated in coordinated multi-union action. This was the first time in four decades that teachers, nurses, doctors, firefighters, and public servants struck together on a single day.

The October 2025 mega-strike falls outside this dissertation's 2021-2024 DV coding window and does not alter the NZ=No Wave finding. But it is analytically necessary for completing the NZ narrative, and it constitutes a methodologically significant form of evidence that deserves explicit framing. The event functions as a post-window partial counterfactual: what it establishes is that the 2021-2024 non-wave was a

product of specific, removable institutional conditions rather than a structural ceiling on New Zealand labor movement capacity. The same unions, the same workers, and substantially the same organizational infrastructure produced a genuine wave once the institutional channels that had been absorbing union energy under Labour were closed.

This is a rare instance in the comparative industrial relations literature where the same labor movement, within a five-year window, produces a non-wave outcome under one set of conditions and a genuine wave outcome under a different set – with the causal variable being precisely what the Activation Sequencing Framework identifies as IV1: the institutional conditions that determine whether coordination capacity encounters a wave-level grievance trigger or an institutional accommodation channel.

The mega-strike does not retroactively validate a wave coding for 2021-2024; it validates the NZ analytical interpretation. The 2021-2024 period was not a case of labor movement incapacity mistaken for a non-wave. It was a case of genuine activation encountering non-premature rollback and institutional accommodation – exactly the conditions the framework predicts produce non-wave outcomes from activated networks. Activity continued beyond October 23: the Otago Daily Times (2025) documented a second PSA strike in late November 2025, with approximately 931 PSA members from Otago and Southland walking off the job for the second time in four weeks, confirming that October 23 was the opening of a sustained wave rather than a single coordinated spike.

IV. Synthesis.

Activation Sequencing Hypothesis

The Activation Sequencing Hypothesis (H2) from chapter 2 predicts that post-pandemic strike waves arose where premature rollback coincided with labor movements whose coordination networks were already activated prior to the pandemic. It follows from this that the absence of either condition – not premature rollback, or latent networks – should prevent a wave. The three cases in this chapter collectively demonstrate that each condition is a necessary condition for wave occurrence, providing three distinct illustrations of how conjunctural absence produces alternatives to the robustly exceptional post-pandemic strike waves seen in the U.S. and U.K.

Australia and New Zealand demonstrate that IV1 is a necessary condition: activated coordination networks, present in both cases, were insufficient to produce a wave when the wave-level grievance trigger was absent. Ireland demonstrates that IV2 is equally a necessary condition: premature rollback, present in Ireland at levels comparable to the wave cases, was insufficient to produce a wave when coordination networks were latent. Taken together, and in combination with the Chapter II wave cases and the within-Canada non-wave cases to be examined in Chapter IV, these three cases contribute to the complete demonstration that the conjunction is what the wave outcome requires.

Three Cases, Three Narratives

Australia's narrative is containment. Post-pandemic activity increased from the anomalously depressed 2018-2019 baseline, reflecting the genuine industrial pressure that activated networks generate even in the absence of the wave trigger. But that activity was

channeled through the enterprise bargaining framework, resolved through FWC mechanisms, and never approached the levels that Australia had experienced a decade earlier. The 2022 peak of 196,800 WDL, which appears elevated compared to 2018-2019, is substantially below the 2011 to 2012 period and well within the historical range for an activated labor movement operating under institutional constraints. The post-pandemic period in Australia was not a wave and not a trough: it was, on the evidence, something closer to a return to the prior decade's mean after an anomalously quiet 2018-2019 period. ACTU-activated coordination capacity was deployed toward legislative outcomes – the Secure Jobs Better Pay Act, the Closing Loopholes Acts – rather than industrial escalation, a rational strategic choice given the political opportunity the Albanese government represented.

New Zealand's narrative is continuity with tactic shift. The elevated strike baseline was established in 2018-2019, before the pandemic; the post-pandemic period continues that elevated trajectory without the disjuncture that would constitute a post-pandemic wave. The tactic shift – from frequent brief stoppages to fewer extended disputes – explains the anomalous 2022 person-days-lost figure without altering the DV coding. The Labour government's institutional accommodations channeled CTU organizational energy toward the Fair Pay Agreements process and pay equity claims, producing genuine gains for workers through legislative means and the threat-and-settlement resolution pattern. The October 2025 mega-strike, falling outside the coding window, confirms retrospectively that the 2021-2024 non-wave was a product of specific

institutional conditions rather than a structural ceiling on New Zealand labor movement capacity.

Ireland's narrative is social partnership demobilization. The post-pandemic period did not merely fail to produce a wave; it produced the lowest sustained level of industrial conflict in the modern CSO record. This is not a case of workers lacking grievance: CPI peaked at 9.2 percent in October 2022, real wages declined through the PUP taper, and the threat-without-execution pattern demonstrates that authorization for industrial action was repeatedly granted while execution rates remained around 20 to 25 percent. The social partnership legacy is the mechanism: over two decades of partnership practice had embedded ICTU and affiliated unions in a pattern of institutional engagement that persisted long after the formal agreements that had created it were dissolved.

As cases lacking premature rollback, Australia and New Zealand produce different non-wave forms because their activation pathways were different. Australia's activation ran through a political campaign targeting legislative reform of the Fair Work Act, and its post-pandemic network deployment followed the same legislative channel: the ACTU's coordination capacity, built through Change the Rules, was redirected toward the Albanese government's reform agenda. New Zealand's activation ran through a domestic electoral cycle generating a Fair Pay Agreements opportunity, and its post-pandemic network deployment likewise followed the institutional accommodation channel: CTU organizational energy was absorbed by FPA advocacy and pay equity claims under the Ardern government.

Both produced non-waves, but Australia's non-wave looks like recovery from an anomalously quiet trough, while New Zealand's looks like continuation of an already-elevated trajectory – because the pre-pandemic activation pathways were distinct, the post-pandemic institutional engagements were distinct, and the tactic shifts that resulted were distinct. The same conjunctural condition (~IV1, IV2=1) can produce observably different non-wave forms as a function of the organizational channel through which activation was achieved, just as the same conjunctural condition (IV1=1, IV2=1) produced observably different wave morphologies in the US and UK.

This observation has a direct implication for Ireland. The exceptional severity of Ireland's post-pandemic demobilization is not solely a product of government accommodation or pay agreements; it is also a product of a labor movement whose organizational habits actively suppressed the industrial pressure that macroeconomic conditions had generated. The Building Momentum agreement's industrial peace clause removed the public sector from the potential pool of action, but the WRC-first orientation of Irish unions meant that even in sectors outside the agreement, strike threats were resolved through institutional engagement before execution rather than through the kind of sustained campaigns that Australian or New Zealand workers mounted. The difference between Ireland's outcome and Australia's is not primarily one of macroeconomic conditions; it is one of organizational orientation, and that orientation reflects the social partnership legacy.

Institutional Inertia in Liberal Market Economies

The Ireland case offers a finding about institutional persistence that extends beyond the specific outcome of the 2021-2024 non-wave. Ireland's social partnership formally ended in 2009 following the collapse of the Towards 2016 agreement under troika conditions. By the time the pandemic struck, formal partnership had been absent from Irish industrial relations for over a decade. Yet the behavioral patterns it had produced remained visible in ICTU's strategic orientation throughout the post-pandemic period: in the preference for concessionary negotiation over industrial confrontation, in the embeddedness of union leadership in tripartite institutional dialogue, in the treatment of WRC engagement as the natural first response to disputes, and in the 14 percent execution rate on authorized industrial actions in 2021.

This finding is consistent with what the historical institutionalist literature describes as path dependence, understood here at the organizational-behavioral level rather than the formal-institutional level. Pierson's (2000) analysis established that prior choices constrain subsequent ones by creating self-reinforcing expectations and raising the costs of deviation, producing trajectories that are difficult to exit even when the formal structures that initiated them have changed. Mahoney and Thelen (2015) extended this insight by documenting how institutional change is frequently gradual, incomplete, and residual – with prior forms persisting in modified configurations even after formal structures have been dissolved. What persisted in Ireland after 2009 was not formal social partnership but the organizational orientations, negotiating reflexes, and institutional habits that twenty-two years of partnership practice had embedded in the union leadership

cohort and in the broader institutional culture of Irish industrial relations. Paolucci and Roche (2024) document how Irish labor coordination after the partnership era has been reorganized through informal and residual channels that reproduce many of partnership's practical features without its formal architecture, suggesting that the behavioral legacy of partnership has been actively, if inadvertently, maintained rather than simply inherited.

The Ornston and Schulze-Cleven (2015) distinction between coordination and concertation gives this finding additional analytical precision. Their Comparative Political Studies article argues that coordination – cooperation in production, typically among employers and workers at the firm and sector level – is harder to create but more durable once established. Concertation – cooperation in policy making, state-facilitated and tripartite in character – is more amenable to government intervention and therefore easier to establish, but less durable when the political conditions that sustained it change. Ireland's social partnership was concertation in Ornston and Schulze-Cleven's sense: policy-level cooperation between government, ICTU, and IBEC, sustained by the active facilitation of successive governments and collapsed when the troika's November 2010 bailout removed the political conditions that had made concertation functional. Germany, their coordination case, retained production-level cooperative institutions that proved more durable under the same period of economic stress. The implication for the IV2 coding is precise: Ireland's social partnership produced two decades of practiced concertation but never generated the kind of production-level, inter-organizational coordination infrastructure that the three-condition IV2 test requires. When concertation

collapsed in 2009, Ireland was left not merely without formal social partnership but without the underlying coordination infrastructure that would have constituted activation.

The Ireland case also speaks directly to an unresolved tension in the power resources tradition. Levésque and Murray (2010) distinguish four power resources – including network embeddedness, meaning the degree to which unions have horizontal and vertical links with other unions, community groups, and social movements – from the strategic capabilities required to translate those resources into coordinated action. Their central claim is that resources alone are not enough; unions must also be capable of using them, and specifically capable of the intermediation that "activates networks." Ireland presents the clearest available illustration of this distinction. ICTU possessed network embeddedness – 22 percent union density, affiliated unions across the major public and private sectors, an organizational structure linking nurses, teachers, bus drivers, and civil servants under a shared confederation. What it lacked was the strategic capability of intermediation in the sense Levésque and Murray require: the capacity to translate that structural embeddedness into the kind of cross-sector, legislative-goal-oriented, politically compelling activation that the IV2 three-condition test identifies. As Arnholtz and Refslund (2022) observe in their analysis of associational power, the sheer number of union members is not enough to make statements about the level of associational power – it also depends on whether members are active and willing to act, and on the effectiveness of organizational structures including coordination and internal cohesion. Social partnership ideology had made ICTU members and leaders willing to engage institutionally but not willing to escalate industrially, and the coordination structures it

had developed were concertation structures rather than the mobilization structures the IV2 test requires. The Ireland/Australia comparison – Ireland at 22 percent density producing IV2=Latent, Australia at 14 percent density producing IV2=Activated – is the clearest available empirical illustration of why possession of organizational resources does not determine activation state, and why the capability to translate resources into coordinated industrial action is the analytically relevant variable.

The symmetrical point about Australia and New Zealand is equally relevant to the comparative argument. Where social partnership had not taken deep historical root, opposition remained sticky too. The Change the Rules campaign's activist networks, the NZCTU's Fair Pay Agreements coalition, and the grassroots organizing infrastructure built across the 2010s in both countries did not dissolve when governments changed or when institutional channels were deployed. Activated networks maintained industrial pressure through the Labour government period in New Zealand and through the Albanese government period in Australia, even as the strategic emphasis shifted toward legislative engagement. One caveat is warranted here: what was sticky was organizational orientation toward mobilization, not observed metrics uniformly. New Zealand's stoppages fell 74 percent from 2018-2019 to 2021-2024 even as workers-involved grew 28 percent, demonstrating that tactic-form rather than aggregate mobilization level was what the activated infrastructure sustained. The organizational habits of mobilization – the expectation of cross-sector coordination, the infrastructure for joint campaigns, the cadre of organizers who had been trained in the preceding decade – proved sticky in the same way that social partnership-derived institutional habits proved sticky in Ireland.

The implication for the comparative study of Liberal Market Economies is that institutional inertia operates not only through formal institutional structures, but through organizational cultures and behavioral orientations that formal structures produce. LMEs are not institutionally uniform, and the forms of organizational inertia they contain vary accordingly. Ireland's social partnership legacy produced a particular form of inertia that suppressed industrial conflict even under conditions that would elsewhere have generated it. Australia and New Zealand's activist organizing legacies produced a different form of inertia that maintained industrial pressure even in the absence of the wave-level trigger. Neither form is absolute: Ireland's school secretaries eventually struck in 2025, and NZ workers eventually produced the mega-strike that Labour-era accommodations had prevented. But both forms proved durable across the decade following the formal structures that had created them, and that durability is what the Activation Sequencing Framework's IV2 variable is designed to capture.

Theoretical Implications

This chapter's three cases extend, qualify, and in one instance complicate Chatper 1's theoretical foundations. From comparison of wave and non-wave cases, four claims emerge:

- the cascade conditions the chapter's cases reveal to be necessary
- the internal differentiation of network activation states
- relationship between type of critical juncture and orientation of networks built
- the causal status of the state in constructing and dismantling the coordination infrastructure that activation requires.

The Cascade Condition: Activated Channels Necessary, but Not Sufficient

Chapter 1 draws on Biggs (2005) to establish that waves are self-amplifying processes in which information about employers' revealed vulnerability and workers' demonstrated capacity propagates through organizational and community networks, inducing further action that initial grievance conditions alone could not have generated. Chapter 1 states that this cascade logic "implicitly requires the activated organizational channels through which signal can travel." In addition, the cases in this chapter show that activated channels must be capable of cross-sector signal propagation, which in legally fragmented jurisdictions requires extra-legal infrastructure rather than just formal inter-organizational ties.

Australia and New Zealand both possessed activated coordination networks. Signal did travel within sectors: nurses struck in 2021 and voted for further strike dates across multiple subsequent rounds; teachers mounted successive stoppages in 2022; firefighters ran a months-long dispute in New Zealand that extended through mediation and ratification. The intra-sector cascade was operational. But the signal did not cross sector boundaries. The Australian dispute landscape of 2021–2024 records healthcare, education, transport, maritime, retail, energy, and law enforcement actions occurring in successive years without any instance of sympathy action, ACTU-called general solidarity, or cross-sector escalation. Each dispute ran its course within its own institutional track. The cascade that Biggs describes, the self-amplifying dynamic in which later strikes are partly caused by earlier ones across different sectors and employers, did not occur.

What limited the cascade was not the absence of activated channels but the enterprise bargaining architecture through which those channels were constrained to operate. Australia's Fair Work Act confines protected industrial action to single-employer enterprise bargaining disputes; New Zealand's Employment Relations Act operates through the same logic at the multi-employer level, with the Fair Pay Agreements Act – potentially the instrument through which cross-employer coordination could have been legally institutionalized – repealed before any agreement was concluded. The legal structure ensured that even where inter-organizational ties were active, the signal they could carry was bounded by the employer-specific bargaining track. Workers at Woolworths distribution centres could authorize indefinite strike action; that authorization could not legally or institutionally extend to workers at rival logistics firms or to workers in adjacent sectors. The organizational channels were live; the legal architecture ensured they could not propagate signal across their boundaries.

This qualification is not specific to Australia and New Zealand. Chapter 1 establishes that the US, UK, British Columbia, and Ontario all operate under legal frameworks that prohibit or fail to protect cross-sector or secondary action. What distinguishes the wave cases from the non-wave cases is not that the wave cases had legally permissive architectures for cross-sector action, but that their activated networks had developed extra-legal channels through which cross-sector signal could travel despite the legal constraints: the Fight for $15 campaign operated through social movement coalitions that were not protected industrial action; the TUC's coordinated cross-sector mobilization operated through campaign infrastructure rather than joint industrial action.

Conversely, in Australia and New Zealand, activated networks were oriented toward legislative channels rather than extra-legal solidarity networks.

The theoretical implication is that the cascade condition requires not only activated channels, but channels capable of carrying signal across employer and sector boundaries despite legal constraints. In legally fragmented jurisdictions, this requires extra-legal infrastructure that goes beyond the formal organizational ties that constitute activation in the Chapter 1 sense. Activated networks that are exclusively institutionally channeled generate intra-sector cascades without generating cross-sector ones.

Internal Differentiation: Modes of Maintenance

Chapter 1 treats the activation state of coordination networks as a binary variable: networks are either operationally active or latent at the moment of shock onset. The Chapter 4 cases reveal that this binary conceals a consequential distinction within the activated state. Chapter 1 draws on Korpi's (1985) three-stage model – mobilization of resources, maintenance in a form ready for use, and application – and locates the framework's contribution at the maintenance stage: whether networks were being actively exercised for cross-sector mobilization when the shock arrived. The cases reveal that maintenance is not a unitary condition but has at least two observably distinct modes with different implications for what kind of action becomes possible when a shock arrives.

Australia's coordination networks were activated through the Change the Rules campaign – a politically-oriented legislative strategy targeting the Fair Work Act, conducting mass rallies across fourteen cities, spending $25 million on a federal election

campaign, and compelling the Morrison government to respond publicly. New Zealand's networks were activated through the 2018–2019 domestic political cycle – a wave of strikes oriented toward the Ardern government's legislative agenda, particularly the Fair Pay Agreements project. Both activations were institutionally oriented in their origin: both involved labor movements exercising cross-sector coordination in pursuit of legislative goals with sympathetic governments. Under the Labour and Albanese government periods that followed, both movements maintained their activated networks by deploying them toward those same institutional channels: CTU energy flowed toward the FPA legislative process; ACTU coordination capacity flowed toward the Secure Jobs Better Pay and Closing Loopholes legislative agendas. Maintenance occurred, but it occurred through institutional engagement rather than through the adversarial extra-legal solidarity-building that characterized US and UK network maintenance during the same period.

The US and UK activations had a different character. Both were produced by sustained hostile pressure – nationally coordinated employer anti-union strategies in the US, a decade of government-imposed public sector pay restraint in the UK – that compelled extra-institutional coordination precisely because formal channels were either unreliable or structurally inadequate to address the shared threat. The Fight for $15 campaign, Labor Notes networks, and UAW reform movements were built against hostile adversaries; the TUC's cross-sector campaign infrastructure was built against an austerity government. The orientation of these activations was adversarial and extra-institutional

by necessity. Their maintenance mode involved repeated, practically exercised cross-sector solidarity rather than institutional engagement with sympathetic political actors.

What this distinction reveals is that Korpi's maintenance stage needs internal differentiation. Institutionally-channeled maintenance and adversarially-oriented maintenance are not equivalent in their implications for what happens when a shock arrives. Institutionally-channeled maintenance preserves the organizational infrastructure of activation – the inter-organizational ties, the shared calendars, the cadre of experienced organizers – while orienting the network's practical energy toward legislative and institutional arenas. Adversarially-oriented maintenance exercises those ties continuously in the kind of extra-legal cross-sector solidarity that cascade dynamics require. The distinction matters for the framework's predictions: both modes are sufficient to sustain IV2=Activated coding; they are not equivalent in what they make possible when IV1 is present. The Chapter 4 cases cannot fully test this prediction because all three are IV1=Not Premature cases, but the NZ post-window counterfactual offers the closest available evidence: when institutional channels were forcibly closed under the National-ACT coalition, the institutionally-maintained activated network converted rapidly to industrial escalation, suggesting that institutionally-channeled maintenance does bank wave-producing capacity even if it does not continuously exercise it. The organizational habits, inter-union relationships, and strategic repertoires of the pre-pandemic activation remained available when the institutional channel closed. Activation banking – preservation of wave-producing capacity in institutional channels awaiting the trigger that

will convert it to industrial expression – is the theoretical concept the NZ evidence makes available.

This refinement connects directly to Goods, Veen, Barratt, and Smith's (2024) two-state model of coalitional power resources, which Chapter 1 cites for developing "the most explicit activation-state language within the PRA tradition." Goods et al. argue that coalitional resources exist in either latent or active states. The Chapter 4 cases suggest a three-state model: latent (Ireland), institutionally-activated (Australia and New Zealand under Labour and Albanese governments), and adversarially-activated (US and UK throughout the 2010s). The transition from institutionally-activated to adversarially-activated is possible under specific conditions, as NZ 2025 demonstrates, and the intermediate state preserves the capacity for that transition. What distinguishes latent from institutionally-activated is not observable in the DV coding but is visible in the below-threshold industrial pressure: Ireland produced demobilization; Australia and New Zealand produced sustained industrial conflict within institutional channel.

Possession, Use, and the Direction of Use

Chapter 1 builds the Lévesque and Murray (2010) possession/use distinction into the framework's foundational logic, establishing that the gap between possessing organizational resources and deploying them for cross-sector mobilization is the variable that activation sequencing is designed to capture. The Chapter 4 cases provide an empirical illustration for this theoretical claim. Ireland entered the pandemic with union density of approximately 22 percent – more than double Australia's 14 percent and substantially above New Zealand's 17 percent. Ireland's ICTU organizational

infrastructure linked affiliated unions across healthcare, education, transport, and public services under a shared confederation. By the stock-of-resources metric that union density approximates, Ireland was the best-positioned labor movement in this chapter. Yet Ireland produced the steepest decline in industrial conflict of any case in the study: workers involved falling 87 percent below the prior-decade average, days lost falling 87 percent, disputes declining 40 percent. Australia, with the lowest density of the three cases, produced a 62 percent increase in WDL relative to its 2018–2019 baseline. The rank-ordering predicted by possessional accounts is directly inverted.

This is the finding that Arnholtz and Refslund (2022) anticipate when they observe that the sheer number of union members is not enough to characterize associational power – it also depends on whether members are active and willing to act, and on the effectiveness of coordination and internal cohesion. Ireland's members were willing enough to ballot for industrial action repeatedly; the 2021 execution rate of approximately 14 percent on authorized industrial actions demonstrates that authorization was granted but not exercised. What was absent was not member willingness but the strategic orientation that would have directed collective willingness toward industrial escalation rather than WRC engagement. Social partnership ideology had produced a labor movement that coordinated effectively through concertation channels while directing the practical energy of that coordination systematically away from industrial confrontation. The coordination was real; its direction was away from the form of use the wave definition requires.

Frangi, Masi, and Poirier (2023), whose analysis of Quebec union societal networks Chapter 1 cites for empirical support of the possession/use distinction, document that labor movements may possess extensive ties without strategically deploying them, what they term the "underexploitation of societal network potential" as a structural pattern. Their finding pertains specifically to societal power ties: the horizontal connections between unions and community organizations, social movement actors, and civil society groups. The Chapter 4 cases extend this pattern from societal ties to industrial coordination networks themselves. Ireland did not merely underexploit societal network potential; it underexploited its industrial coordination infrastructure across an entire post-pandemic period of macroeconomic grievance. The structural pattern Frangi et al. identify in Quebec's societal networks operated in Ireland's industrial networks at a historically exceptional level of suppression. The theoretical implication is that underexploitation of coordination potential is not limited to the societal power dimension of the PRA typology but characterizes the industrial coordination dimension in cases where the strategic orientation of the movement's leadership systematically redirects organizational energy away from industrial expression.

The possession/use distinction also illuminates the Australia/New Zealand comparison at the below-wave level. Both had activated networks; both produced below-wave industrial pressure. But the form of that pressure differed in ways that trace to the organizational channels through which activation was maintained. Australia's enterprise-bargaining-channeled activation produced sector-specific, institutionally-resolved disputes across a widening range of sectors – new sectors being reached without

producing cross-sector escalation. New Zealand's FPA-process-channeled activation produced fewer but longer disputes, the tactic shift that accounts for the anomalous 2022 PDL figure. Same activation state, different maintenance mode, different below-wave industrial form. The possession/use distinction as Lévesque and Murray develop it is a binary: resources are either deployed or they are not. The Chapter 4 cases suggest that the direction and mode of deployment – toward which channels, through which organizational forms, in pursuit of which goals – shapes the observable industrial output even when the fundamental possession/use distinction places cases in the same activated category.

State Construction and the Limits of Network Durability

Chapter 1 draws on Howell's (2021) argument that the state's active role in constructing and reconstructing employment relations has been systematically undertheorized – that coordination infrastructure is not simply inherited through institutional path-dependence but actively built and dismantled through political decisions. The Chapter 4 cases provide the clearest available empirical demonstration of this claim, and they do so on a compressed timeline that makes the causal claim unusually legible.

The New Zealand Fair Pay Agreements Act was enacted in December 2022 and repealed in December 2023 – thirteen months between Royal Assent and repeal, with zero Fair Pay Agreements concluded in the interval. The Equal Pay Amendment Act of May 2025, passed under urgency without select committee review, cancelled 33 existing pay equity claims covering at least 150,000 workers. These are not gradual institutional

drifts or incremental erosions of the kind that liberalization scholarship documents across decades; they are deliberate political demolitions of coordination infrastructure on a timeline of months. The coordination infrastructure that Fair Pay Agreements would have institutionalized was designed to create exactly the kind of cross-sector, multi-employer bargaining capacity that the IV2 three-condition test identifies as characteristic of activated networks: workers from genuinely distinct institutional domains coordinating toward legislative goals and producing public political events that compelled government response. That infrastructure was built, in legislation, and then dismantled, in legislation, before it could produce the organizational practice and institutional habits that would have embedded it durably.

This compression highlights a theoretical point that the longer arc of institutional change in other cases obscures. Howell argues that coordination infrastructure is built through political choices; the NZ FPA repeal demonstrates that it can also be unbuilt through political choices on timelines short enough to prevent the self-reinforcing feedback loops that Pierson's (2000) path-dependence account describes. An institutional arrangement requires time to produce the complementary organizational adaptations, shared expectations, and behavioral norms that make it self-sustaining. Ireland's social partnership produced those adaptations over twenty-two years; when partnership formally ended, the behavioral legacy was durable enough to persist for a decade. New Zealand's FPA Act produced none of those adaptations in twelve months; when it was repealed, there was no behavioral legacy to outlast the formal structure. The lesson for the activation account is that the durability of activated networks – their capacity to maintain

wave-producing potential across a political cycle – is partly a function of how long the structures that produced them have had to generate self-sustaining organizational habits. Activation produced through sustained historical experience is more durable than activation produced through recent political campaigns; network maintenance through decades of practiced cross-sector coordination is more durable than network maintenance through a single electoral cycle.

CHAPTER 5: CANADA – QUEBEC, ONTARIO, AND BRITISH COLUMBIA

The within-Canada comparison is the closest this dissertation gets to a controlled test of the activation-sequencing argument. Quebec, Ontario, and British Columbia all share a federal institutional framework, identical macroeconomic conditions throughout the pandemic period, and the same rollback of pandemic-era federal income supports. The Canada Recovery Benefit, the federal government's primary pandemic income replacement program, expired on October 23, 2021 across all provinces simultaneously. This means economically premature rollback is not merely coded identically for all three cases: it is premature by the same mechanism (the CRB's calendar expiry), on the same date, in the same amount ($500 per week), against the same inflationary environment (CPI at 4.7 percent against a 2 percent Bank of Canada target). The within-Canada comparison does not hold IV1 approximately constant across broadly similar cases. It holds IV1 perfectly constant across three cases that received identical federal policy.

This design asset creates the most demanding possible test of IV2's causal necessity. What varies across Quebec, Ontario, and British Columbia is only the activation status of labor movement coordination networks at pandemic onset. Quebec's networks were operationally exercised for cross-sector, extra-contractual mobilization across the decade before the pandemic arrived. Ontario's networks were not – channeled instead toward constitutional litigation and intra-sectoral education disputes that did not cross sector lines in the pre-pandemic window. British Columbia's networks were not – channeled toward institutional engagement with a labor-sympathetic NDP government that resolved disputes through mediation before cross-sector implications could develop.

The observed DV outcomes follow exactly the pattern IV2 variation predicts: Quebec produced the largest public-sector strike wave in its recorded history; Ontario and BC produced contained, sectoral disputes without cross-sector escalation.

Three analytical contributions follow specifically from the within-Canada design. First, the comparison provides the strongest available evidence for IV2's causal necessity – not correlation, not co-occurrence, but a controlled variation in which the triggering condition is held fixed and only the organizational condition differs. Second, it provides a particularly clean falsification of the mobilization capacity hypothesis at the subnational level, where the structural baselines are more similar than in any cross-national comparison: Quebec, Ontario, and BC share the same LME institutional heritage, the same federal collective bargaining law framework, and broadly similar union density, yet produce wildly divergent outcomes. Third, the chapter adds a novel institutional feature to the framework's scope – the federal government's systematic invocation of Section 107 of the Canada Labor Code in federally regulated industries, which constitutes a second-order containment mechanism operating above the provincial level that no other case in the study presents.

The chapter is structured in four parts:

- Part I codes the dependent variable for all three provinces from Chapter 2 criteria.
- Part II codes IV1 and IV2 for all three provinces.
- Part III presents the process traces, organized by province: Quebec, Ontario, British Columbia, followed by a discussion of processes at the federal level.
- Part IV discusses the theoretical implications of this within-country comparison.

I. Dependent Variable: Coding as Waves and Non-Waves.

A post-pandemic strike wave, as operationalized in Chapter 2, requires that three criteria be simultaneously satisfied: robust exceptionalism, disjuncture from pre-pandemic trends, and cross-sector dispersion. The following sections apply these criteria to Quebec, Ontario, and British Columbia in turn.

Quebec

Criterion 1 – Robust Exceptionalism

Quebec's post-pandemic strike record is exceptional by any standard of comparison, and the evidence for Criterion 1 is unambiguous. Prior to the pandemic, Quebec averaged approximately 157 work stoppages per year across the 2010-2019 decade (Statistics Canada, CWLD database). The post-pandemic period shattered that baseline in every year: 159 stoppages in 2021, 221 in 2022, 304 in 2023, and 299 in 2024 (Statistics Canada, CWLD database; IEDM, 2025). In Quebec, a province of 9 million, person-days lost reached 1.5 million in 2023 alone – approximately 3.6 times the prior five-year average – and Quebec, representing 22% of the Canadian population, accounted for 43% percent of all Canadian work stoppages recorded in 2024 (IEDM, 2025). Post-pandemic values exceeded prior decade peaks across all three standard metrics in multiple successive years. The 100 percent average-exceedance threshold, the peak-exceptionalism requirement, and the no-decline requirement on all three metric averages are all satisfied, and satisfied with substantial margin. Criterion 1 is met.

Criterion 2 – Disjuncture from Pre-Pandemic Trends

Quebec's post-pandemic escalation cannot be read as the continuation of a trend already underway before March 2020. The 2018-2019 period in Quebec was comparatively quiet: strike activity in those years gave no indication of the trajectory that would follow. The 2022-2023 Common Front negotiation, in which over 420,000 public sector workers coordinated across education, healthcare, and social services in a sustained wave of escalating actions culminating in a province-wide strike of unprecedented scale, represents a sharp and unambiguous disjuncture from the immediately preceding baseline. The 2023 total of 304 work stoppages represents roughly double the pre-pandemic decade average and a trajectory change of a kind that cannot be attributed to pre-existing momentum (Statistics Canada, CWLD database). The post-pandemic period is not Quebec returning to a prior high; it is Quebec exceeding every prior high on record. Criterion 2 is met.

Criterion 3 – Sectoral Dispersion.

Quebec's post-pandemic strike activity documents precisely the cross-sector spread that Criterion 3 requires: the simultaneous entry into the conflict of workers from sectors with no significant recent strike history alongside those already active in the baseline period. The 2022–23 Common Front mobilized 420,000 workers across education, healthcare, and social services simultaneously – not sequentially, but in coordinated parallel action across genuinely distinct institutional domains (CBC News, December 10, 2023; Jacobin, January 25, 2024). The Fédération autonome de l'enseignement (FAE), representing 66,000 teachers bargaining independently of the

Common Front, launched an unlimited strike on November 23, 2023 that shuttered approximately 800 schools, coordinating its timing and demands with the Common Front despite its formal independence (CBC News, December 12, 2023). The Fédération interprofessionnelle de la santé du Québec (FIQ), representing 80,000 nurses, launched a four-day parallel strike beginning December 11, 2023 – the first time the FIQ had struck in 25 years (CBC News, December 10, 2023). At its peak, over 560,000 workers (approximately six percent of Quebec's entire population) were simultaneously on strike (CBC News, December 12, 2023). The FIQ's first strike in a quarter century is the clearest single instance of a previously quiescent sector entering the conflict: 80,000 nurses who had not struck within the 2010–2019 baseline period became strike participants. The APTS (allied health and social services professionals) joined as a direct Common Front member for the first time in the province's history, representing another organizational entry point not present in prior rounds (Newswire, September 28, 2022). Cross-sector dispersion is not merely present; it is the defining structural feature of the Quebec wave. Criterion 3 is met. DV coded: Wave.

Ontario

Criterion 1 – Robust Exceptionalism

Ontario's post-pandemic strike record does not establish the robust exceptionalism that Criterion 1 requires. There is legitimate escalation, particularly in 2022; however, strike activity in Ontario remained sectorally bounded, exhibiting fewer annual work stoppages – albeit of greater per-stoppage intensity.

For the 2010-2019 decade before the pandemic, the province averaged:

- 65.4 work stoppages per year across the 2010-2019 decade, with a peak of 155 in 2012
- workers involved averaged 23,004 annually with a peak of 67,618 in 2012
- person-days lost averaged 331,230 annually with a peak of 705,117 in 2010

(Statistics Canada, CWLD database)

Against that baseline, Ontario's post-pandemic figures averaged:

- 51.8 stoppages per year from 2021 to 2024, a 21% reduction from before the pandemic, with a peak of 64 stoppages in 2023
- workers involved averaged 51,784 annually, with a spike to 124,131 in 2022 driven entirely by the one-week CUPE/Bill 28 episode
- person-days lost averaged 536,686 annually

Post-pandemic averages for stoppages (Ontario's post-pandemic average of 51.8 stoppages per year) is below the pre-pandemic decade average of 65.4, representing a decline rather than escalation on the metric most directly sensitive to diffusion.

Peak exceedance occurs on only two instances: "workers involved" and "person-days lost" in 2022, both from the same crisis episode in the same year, falling short of the three-instance requirement.

While Ontario shows signs of escalated mobilization, the evidence does not support a finding of widespread or peak exceptionalism. Criterion 1 is not met.

Criterion 2 – Disjuncture from Pre-Pandemic Trends

Nor does Ontario's post-pandemic record establish a disjuncture from pre-pandemic trends. The 2018-2019 trajectory in Ontario was itself at subdued levels, and

the post-pandemic period has not produced a break upward from that trajectory. Ontario's industrial relations landscape in 2021-2024 is characterized by sectoral disputes – education, transit, retail – resolved through existing institutional channels without cross-sector escalation. There is no inflection point in the data corresponding to the moment of pandemic-era support withdrawal; the post-pandemic period continues the pre-pandemic pattern of contained, sector-specific activity rather than breaking from it. Criterion 2 is not met.

Criterion 3 – Sectoral Dispersion

Ontario's post-pandemic disputes were concentrated in sectors with established pre-pandemic strike histories. The major post-pandemic disputes – education sector bargaining involving ETFO, OSSTF, OECTA, and CUPE's school board locals; transit disputes including the ATU Local 1587 GO Transit strike of November 2022; and the Unifor Metro grocery strike of July-August 2023 – all occurred within pre-existing institutional tracks between unions and employers with established bargaining relationships (CBC News; Toronto Star; Global News). The education sector had been the site of sustained pre-pandemic conflict through the 2019-2020 bargaining round; transit and grocery workers had recorded disputes within the 2010-2019 baseline period. No union, worker category, or industry with no significant pre-pandemic strike history entered the conflict during the post-pandemic period. Ontario's 2022 spike in workers involved and person-days lost was driven by CUPE education support workers, the same sector and employment relationship as the pre-pandemic disputes, not by the entry of previously quiescent workers.

The post-pandemic period produced more intense disputes within familiar sectoral tracks; it did not produce the spread to new actors that the wave definition requires. Criterion 3 is not met. DV coded: No Wave.

British Columbia

Criterion 1 – Robust Exceptionalism

While Ontario's case is more nuanced, British Columbia's post-pandemic metrics are decisively below the strike wave threshold. British Columbia exhibited the following metrics for the 2010-2019 pre-pandemic period:

- an average of 22.0 work stoppages per year across the 2010-2019 decade, with a peak of 53 in 2012
- an average of 17,081 workers involved annually, with a peak of 86,527 in 2014
- an average of 232,988 person-days lost annually, with a peak of 1,224,130 in 2014 (Statistics Canada, CWLD database)

For the post-pandemic 2021-2024 period, British Columbia recorded the following activity:

- 22, 21, 21, and 24 stoppages in 2021 through 2024 respectively, for a post-pandemic average of 22.0 – identical to the pre-pandemic decade average
- "workers involved" averaged 12,529 annually, 27% below the pre-pandemic average
- "person-days lost" averaged 122,054, 48% below the pre-pandemic average (Statistics Canada, CWLD database)

The no-decline and peak-exceedance requirements of Criterion 1 are not met. Criterion 1 is not met.

Criterion 2 – Disjuncture from Pre-Pandemic Trends

British Columbia's post-pandemic period does not represent a disjuncture from pre-pandemic trends. The province's post-pandemic industrial relations landscape has been defined by high strike mandate votes and credible strike threats, but by resolution through mediation before cross-sector escalation develops – a pattern continuous with the immediate pre-pandemic period rather than discontinuous from it. The elevated strike readiness visible in BC's post-pandemic case studies represents intensification of existing patterns, not the kind of trajectory break that Criterion 2 requires. There is no upward inflection point in the data corresponding to the post-pandemic window. Criterion 2 is not met.

Criterion 3 – Sectoral Dispersion.

British Columbia's post-pandemic disputes did not produce the cross-sector entry of previously quiescent workers that Criterion 3 requires. The province's major post-pandemic disputes ran through pre-existing public sector institutional tracks in sequential rather than simultaneous fashion. The BCGEU, representing provincial government workers, liquor and cannabis store employees, and correctional officers, struck in 2022, a sector with an established pre-pandemic bargaining history. The BCTF (teachers), BCNU (nurses), and Facilities Bargaining Association (hospital workers) bargained in separate sequential rounds, with each settlement following from the wage pattern established by the BCGEU rather than through simultaneous cross-sector mobilization.

BCNU president Adriane Gear explicitly characterized her union's position as downstream from what the BCGEU achieved: "There's just a lot of gratitude for the BCGEU in terms of taking the stand that they did. The general wage increase that the BCGEU was able to secure after their valiant job action benefits everybody" (Gear, cited in Kamloops BC Now, December 2022). BCGEU president Paul Finch described the same dynamic from the other direction: "What we achieved has already directly increased what the Facilities Bargaining Association will receive. We believe it has fundamentally changed the mandate across the province" (Finch, cited in Kamloops BC Now, December 2022).

This is wage-pattern diffusion through sequential sectoral bargaining, the institutional channel through which BC's labor relations normally operate, not Biggs-style cascade to previously quiescent sectors. By 2024, BC recorded just nine strikes, with each running its course within its own pre-existing institutional track (The Maple, January 6, 2025). No sector with no significant pre-pandemic strike history entered the conflict during the post-pandemic period. Criterion 3 is not met. DV coded: No Wave.

Implications of Within-Country Provincial Divergence

The DV divergence documented above presents a puzzle that standard predictors do not resolve. Union density does not track the variation: Ontario and British Columbia both have union density comparable to or exceeding Quebec's, yet produced no wave. Party government does not resolve it: British Columbia was governed by the NDP throughout the pre-pandemic and pandemic periods, formally the most labor-aligned of the three provincial governments, yet produced no wave. Macroeconomic conditions

offer no leverage: all three provinces experienced the same inflation trajectory, the same labor market disruption, and the same erosion of real wages following pandemic-era support withdrawal. Standard theories of strike activity – density, party government, economic grievance – would predict comparable outcomes across the three provinces. They did not occur.

The reason none of these predictors resolves the variation is that none of them varies across the three cases in the relevant way. But one variable does vary – and the design of this chapter is constructed to make that variation analytically visible. The federal government was the primary vehicle for pandemic-era economic support in Canada. The Canada Recovery Benefit expired on October 23, 2021 across all provinces simultaneously. Canadian CPI stood at 4.7 percent against a 2 percent Bank of Canada target at that date, and real wages were negative year-over-year. The rollback was economically premature – and it was identically premature for Quebec, Ontario, and British Columbia, because federal policy does not differ by province. All three provinces receive the same IV1 coding, and that identity is not a complication of the analysis. It is the methodological asset that makes the within-Canada comparison the dissertation's most controlled test.

With IV1 held constant, the divergence in DV outcomes isolates IV2 – the activation status of labor movement coordination networks – as the only available explanatory variable. Quebec's networks were activated before March 2020; Ontario's and British Columbia's were not. Part 2 develops this coding in full.

II. Independent Variables.

IV1: Economically Premature Rollback of Pandemic-Era Protections

A case is coded premature rollback where the withdrawal of pandemic-era income supports preceded the resolution of the macroeconomic conditions that made those supports necessary, operationalized through two conditions: that real wages had recovered to pre-pandemic levels at the moment of rollback, and that inflation had returned to target ranges. Where both conditions were resolved at rollback, the withdrawal is coded not premature. Where either or both conditions remained unresolved, the timing is coded premature.

The Canada Recovery Benefit – the federal government's primary continuous income replacement program, providing $500 per week to workers unable to work due to COVID-19 – expired on October 23, 2021. This is the operative rollback date for all three Canadian provinces examined in this chapter. At that date, Canadian real wages were negative year-over-year: the first condition was not met. Canadian CPI stood at 4.7 percent against a 2 percent Bank of Canada target: the second condition was not met. Neither condition had resolved at the moment of rollback (Statistics Canada, 2021).

The analytical significance of this coding is not only that it establishes premature rollback as a condition present in all three cases – it is that the coding is identical across all three. Federal policy does not vary by province. Quebec, Ontario, and British Columbia all received the same federal income supports on the same schedule; all three experienced the same expiry on the same date; all three faced the same inflationary environment and the same real wage trajectory at that date. The within-Canada

comparison therefore holds IV1 constant across all three cases, isolating variation in IV2 – the activation status of coordination networks – as the only variable available to explain divergent outcomes. IV1 coded: Premature – Quebec, Ontario, and British Columbia.

IV2: Pre-Pandemic Activation of Labor Movement Coordination Networks

A coordination network is coded activated where three conditions are simultaneously satisfied in the period before March 2020. The first condition is that the coordination brings together workers from more than one distinct world of work – people whose jobs, employers, and the rules governing their employment are genuinely different from each other. The second condition is that the coordination is reaching for something that a contract negotiation could never deliver on its own – a legislative goal, a statutory change, or a policy outcome that exceeds the authority of any individual employer at the bargaining table. The third condition is that the coordination produces a public political event that prompts political actors outside the bargaining relationship to respond publicly. All three conditions must be simultaneously satisfied within the pre-pandemic window. A case is coded latent when the pre-pandemic evidentiary record does not establish that all three conditions were met.

March 2020 is the hard evidentiary cutoff. No evidence generated during or after the pandemic may be used to establish pre-pandemic activation status. This anti-circularity protocol is not merely methodological housekeeping: if activation were inferred from the occurrence of a subsequent wave, the argument would be circular, restating the outcome as its own explanation. Each coding in this section is independently verifiable against pre-cutoff sources alone.

IV2 Coding: Quebec

The activated coding for Quebec rests on two layers of evidence that operate at different levels and together constitute a stronger case than either alone. The first is institutional: Quebec's legal architecture for public sector bargaining provides a statutory default toward common front coordination between the major union centrales, and the organizational culture that Common Front bargaining has produced over successive rounds since the 1970s maintains the relational infrastructure and activist networks capable of cross-sector mobilization between formal bargaining episodes. The second is episodic: the September 2019 climate action organized through the Lutte Commune network provides direct, pre-pandemic documentation that all three activation conditions were simultaneously satisfied. The episodic anchor carries the coding; the institutional layer explains why such an action was possible in Quebec in 2019 and why the underlying capacity it demonstrates was, at that moment, operational rather than latent.

Condition 1 – Workers from More than One Distinct World of Work

Quebec's inter-central coordination infrastructure brought together workers from genuinely distinct worlds of work on a recurring basis across the full pre-pandemic decade – not as an exceptional mobilization but as the normal operating mode of the province's public-sector labor movement.

The foundation was laid in May 2009, when seven organizations – CSN, FTQ, CSQ, FIQ, SFPQ, APTS, and SPGQ – announced a historic Common Front for the 2010 bargaining round, representing 475,000 workers (Le Soleil, May 11, 2009; SCFP, May 11, 2009; CSN, May 11, 2009). These seven organizations represent workers from

categorically distinct institutional domains: CSQ and CSN affiliates represent teachers and CEGEP faculty; FIQ represents nurses and licensed practical nurses; APTS represents allied health professionals – physiotherapists, social workers, laboratory technicians; SFPQ and SPGQ represent government professionals and public servants in provincial ministries. These workers have different employers, different workplaces, different professional licensing regimes, and different governing legislation. Their coordination is not intra-sector solidarity – it is the systematic bridging of genuinely distinct worlds of work through a jointly constituted coalition structure (Collombat, À bâbord!, No. 100, Summer 2024). The 2010 Common Front operationalized this coalition through a negotiated settlement – the first without special legislation since 1999 – establishing that cross-sector coordination could produce binding industrial outcomes (Radio-Canada, June 2010).

The same cross-sector coalition structure recurred in 2012. On May 25, 2012, over 70 organizations – including FTQ, CSN, CSQ, CSD, APTS, FIQ, SFPQ, and SPGQ – jointly filed constitutional challenges against Bill 78 before the Quebec Superior Court (CSQ, May 25, 2012). The coalition spanning nurses, teachers, allied health professionals, public servants, and government professionals acting jointly in the legal domain is Condition 1 satisfied in a non-bargaining context, demonstrating that cross-world-of-work coordination was not confined to Common Front rounds.

The 2014-2015 Refusons l'austérité coalition extended this pattern further. The collectif brought together CSN, FTQ, CSQ, CSD, APTS, SFPQ, and SPGQ alongside community organizations, feminist groups, environmental organizations, and student

federations (CSN, November 29, 2014; The Militant, December 22, 2014). The November 29, 2014 marches in Montreal and Quebec City drew over 125,000 participants from across these organizations (CSN, November 29, 2014; Radio-Canada, November 29, 2014). The 2015 Common Front then reunited CSQ, CSN, FTQ, and SISP affiliates – again spanning education, healthcare, allied health, and public service – representing 400,000 workers in a coordinated national strike on December 9, 2015 (CSQ, December 9, 2015).

In the joint campaigns of 2018, the cross-sector character of coordination extended into the policy domain. The "La pièce manquante" pharmacare campaign was launched jointly by CSN and FTQ presidents Boyer and Létourneau on September 9, 2018, and subsequently expanded to include CSQ and CSD, with a joint letter co-signed by FTQ, CSN, CSQ, FIQ, and APTS (FTQ, September 9, 2018; CSN, September 9, 2018). Five organizations representing workers from education, nursing, allied health, manufacturing, construction, and public services coordinated a joint political campaign – cross-sector in its organizational composition and extra-contractual in its objective.

The September 27, 2019 Lutte Commune climate action provides the final pre-pandemic confirmation. Eleven union locals representing workers from three different labor federations formally voted to strike for a day, with participants drawn from CEGEP teachers, rank-and-file militants, and environmental movement organizations – workers from distinct institutional domains with different employers, workplaces, and governing rules (Labor Notes, October 2019). This action was organized deliberately outside the formal centrales, through Lutte Commune's cross-federation relational infrastructure,

demonstrating that cross-sector coordination capacity existed and was operational not only at the central leadership level but at the rank-and-file level as well.

Condition 1 is met (Le Soleil, May 11, 2009; SCFP, May 11, 2009; Radio-Canada, June 2010; CSQ, May 25, 2012; CSN, November 29, 2014; CSQ, December 9, 2015; FTQ, September 9, 2018; CSN, September 9, 2018; Labor Notes, October 2019).

Condition 2 – Agenda Expands Beyond Scope of a Contract Negotiation

Quebec's inter-central coordination networks were directed toward legislative and statutory goals that no employer's signature on a collective agreement could produce on multiple documented occasions across the pre-pandemic decade.

The 2012 Alliance Sociale joint constitutional challenge is the earliest and most legally explicit instance. On May 25, 2012, over 70 organizations jointly filed challenges against Bill 78 before the Quebec Superior Court (CSQ, May 25, 2012). Bill 78 was emergency legislation restricting freedom of assembly and imposing steep fines on organizations facilitating protest – its repeal required a government legislative decision, not an employer's agreement. No collective bargaining process and no individual contract negotiation could repeal a statute. The coalition's explicit target was legislation, and its instrument was constitutional litigation – a domain categorically beyond the bargaining table (Globe and Mail, May 18, 2012).

The 2014-2015 Refusons l'austérité campaign targeted government austerity as fiscal policy. The coalition's founding documents are explicit: they demanded the Couillard government reverse $5 billion in public service cuts – decisions made through the provincial budget process, not through any employer's negotiating position (CSN,

November 29, 2014; Radio-Canada, November 29, 2014). No public-sector employer in Quebec had the authority to reverse the Treasury Board's fiscal decisions. The campaign's goal was a change in government policy, achievable only through political pressure on elected officials – precisely the kind of extra-contractual goal Condition 2 requires.

The 2018 "La pièce manquante" ("the missing piece") pharmacare campaign targeted a specific statutory change: the establishment of a universal public pharmacare program through provincial legislation. Boyer and Létourneau were explicit at the September 9, 2018 launch that what they were demanding was a legislative program – "La pièce manquante" referred to pharmacare as the "missing piece" of the public health system that would require a government decision to create (FTQ, September 9, 2018; CSN, September 9, 2018). No employer in Quebec could create a universal pharmacare program through a collective agreement. The campaign was directed at political actors with legislative authority, and was timed explicitly to force all major parties to publicly position during the October 2018 provincial election campaign (FTQ, Élections provinciales 2018: Plateforme de la FTQ, ftq.qc.ca/elections-quebec-2018/).

The September 27, 2019 climate action makes the extra-contractual framing most explicit. The participating workers were seeking a statutory change to provincial climate policy – a goal no employer's signature could produce. The action was deliberately framed as a political strike in direct defiance of Article 106 of the Code du travail, which prohibits striking over political issues. The organizers acknowledged this prohibition and proceeded anyway, on the grounds that the goal – climate legislation – was one no

contract could deliver (Labor Notes, October 2019). The deliberateness of the defiance is itself evidence: workers who understood they were violating the political strike prohibition and struck anyway were making an explicit claim that their objective was beyond the bargaining table's reach.

Condition 2 is met (CSQ, May 25, 2012; Globe and Mail, May 18, 2012; CSN, November 29, 2014; Radio-Canada, November 29, 2014; FTQ, September 9, 2018; CSN, September 9, 2018; FTQ, 2018; Labor Notes, October 2019).

Condition 3 – A Public Political Event Prompting Political Actors Outside the Bargaining Relationship to Respond Publicly

Condition 3 was satisfied on multiple documented occasions across the pre-pandemic decade, establishing a pattern of political response rather than a single episode that barely clears the threshold.

The 2012 Maple Spring mobilization provides the most unambiguous Condition 3 instance in the pre-pandemic record. Premier Jean Charest and Education Minister Michelle Courchesne introduced Bill 78 on May 16, 2012, and the National Assembly passed it 68-48 after an all-night session – emergency legislation restricting freedom of assembly and imposing steep fines on unions that participated in or facilitated protest action (Globe and Mail, May 18, 2012). Education Minister Line Beauchamp had already resigned on May 14, explicitly because the coordinated labor-civil society mobilization had made her position untenable. All three opposition parties publicly condemned the legislation: PQ leader Pauline Marois called it "abusive" and accused Charest of exploiting the crisis for electoral advantage (Globe and Mail, May 18, 2012). The Charest

government called a snap election in August 2012, and the incoming PQ government repealed both Bill 78 and the tuition increase by September 2012 – the direct electoral and legislative consequence of the coordinated mobilization. The political actors compelled to respond were entirely outside the employment relationship: no employer's bargaining position was at stake, no sectoral minister was responding in a routine managerial capacity to a workplace dispute. The government responded to a labor-civil society coalition taking explicit public positions on education policy as government policy.

The 2014-2015 Refusons l'austérité coalition produced equivalent political response. On November 25, 2014 – four days before the mass marches – Treasury Board president Martin Coiteux announced major public service workforce reductions, drawing immediate public condemnation from opposition parties including PQ Labour critic Alain Therrien, who characterized the cuts in terms of the government's ongoing political choices (Radio-Canada, November 25, 2014). The November 29, 2014 marches in Montreal and Quebec City drew PQ and Québec Solidaire representatives as participants, documenting cross-partisan political engagement with the inter-central coalition's demands (Radio-Canada, November 29, 2014). The coalition explicitly targeted government austerity as policy – a goal that no employer's signature on a collective agreement could deliver – and the Couillard government was required to publicly defend its program throughout the period of coordinated action.

The 2018 pharmacare campaign forced all major parties to publicly position on a legislative goal that no employer could deliver. The FTQ's 2018 provincial election

platform documented responses from PQ, CAQ, and QS to the joint CSN-FTQ pharmacare demand, with the PLQ response pending at press time (FTQ, "Élections provinciales 2018 : Plateforme de la FTQ," ftq.qc.ca/elections-quebec-2018/). An election campaign in which all major parties must publicly respond to an inter-central union coalition's legislative demand is Condition 3 at its most textbook: political actors entirely outside the bargaining relationship, compelled to take public positions on a statutory goal beyond any contract's reach.

The September 27, 2019 climate march – 500,000 participants in Montreal, the largest climate march in the world that week – provides the final pre-pandemic confirmation. The scale of the mobilization and the explicit involvement of union organizations coordinating across sector lines in open defiance of the Code du travail's political strike prohibition placed the Legault government in a position where public response was unavoidable (Labor Notes, October 2019). The political actors compelled to respond were entirely outside the employment relationship. Condition 3 is met (Globe and Mail, May 18, 2012; Radio-Canada, November 25, 2014; Radio-Canada, November 29, 2014; FTQ, 2018; Labor Notes, October 2019). All three conditions are simultaneously satisfied in the pre-pandemic window. IV2 coded: Activated.

IV2 Coding: Ontario

Regulatory Containment and Bandwidth Absorption

Ontario's IV2=Latent coding rests on two mutually reinforcing dynamics that together explain why cross-sector coordination networks were not operationally exercised at pandemic onset. The first is regulatory containment: Ontario's Wagner Act model

routes collective action through single-employer bargaining units, providing no statutory mechanism for the kind of common front coordination that Quebec's legal architecture institutionalizes. The second is bandwidth absorption: the organizational energy of Ontario's major labor movement actors was comprehensively consumed by sector-specific defensive battles through precisely the years – 2018 to 2020 – in which cross-sector network building would have needed to occur. The Ford government's 2019 passage of Bill 124, capping public sector compensation at one percent annually, triggered a constitutional challenge absorbing leadership attention, legal resources, and strategic energy across ETFO, OSSTF, ONA, CUPE Ontario, OPSEU, SEIU Healthcare, and the United Steelworkers through the critical pre-pandemic window (ONA, 2019; CBC News, September 12, 2022; Tucker, 2025). Unifor's January 2018 departure from the Canadian Labour Congress severed 315,000 workers from the primary institutional framework for inter-union coordination and eliminated over $10 million in annual per capita dues to the federation system during these same years (Ross and Savage, 2024). The OFL under President Chris Buckley was focused on internal reunification after three major affiliates had withheld dues under the previous president. Ontario's education sector unions – ETFO, OSSTF, OECTA, and AEFO – were simultaneously consumed by Ford government bargaining conflicts that produced the historic February 21, 2020 joint one-day strike: significant coordination within the education employment relationship, but coordination that never crossed sector lines (CBC News, October 7, 2019; CUPE Ontario, November 27, 2019; OSBCU bulletin, January 17, 2020).

The Fight for $15 and Fairness Campaign

The Fight for $15 and Fairness campaign, launched April 15, 2015, is the pre-pandemic episode most likely to satisfy the three activation conditions and requires direct analytical engagement before the coding can proceed. The campaign's organizational composition was cross-sector at the endorsement level, its demands were explicitly legislative, and it produced documented public political events compelling governmental response. On the literal text of all three activation conditions, a case can be made. That case does not survive examination of who actually built and ran the campaign and what relationship it had to Ontario's organized labor movement.

The campaign was anchored at the Workers' Action Centre – a center serving precarious, largely non-union workers – not at the OFL or any union. Its own organizers described its organizational character explicitly. Bush and Nesbitt, writing about the campaign in November 2017, stated:

> Unlike Fight for $15 in the United States, into which the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) poured millions of dollars in funds, the Ontario Fight for $15 and Fairness campaign did not enjoy massive investment from unions. It received some union donations and support and had one full-time organizer, but its limited resources meant that the campaign depended entirely on worker energy and capacity. (Bush and Nesbitt, Jacobin, November 22, 2017).

Karim, a campaign co-organizer, described the campaign's founding logic: "It was during this time that organizers in the Workers' Action Centre in Toronto decided to draft a new set of demands" – demands that "came from the needs of workers, not the business

community, politicians, or academics" (Karim, Economics for the Anthropocene, November 19, 2018). The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives characterized the reality directly:

> The $15 and Fairness campaign has been run out of the Toronto-based Workers' Action Centre (WAC), a small, spunky outfit with a skeletal staff of full-time organizers. Its limited resources betray the fact that $15 and Fairness has received nowhere near the level of support from labor that the Fight for $15 once did in the U.S. (CCPA, 2018)

The relationship between F15F and Ontario's organized labor movement was one of endorsement, not organizational integration. Deena Ladd, WAC's executive director and the campaign's operational anchor, described the campaign's strategy as "investing in a lot of relationship-building and support and mentoring and energy into getting a lot of other, independent organizations off the ground" (Ladd, quoted in Rosenblum, Labor Notes, December 5, 2017). The emphasis on building independent organizations rather than integrating into existing union structures captures the campaign's deliberate organizational logic: it operated alongside Ontario labor, not through it. Jonathan Rosenblum's contemporaneous assessment from Labor Notes confirmed this from the outside: "Although the Ontario Federation of Labour and its union affiliates supported the Fight for $15 and Fairness, in general most unions did not play a central role" (Rosenblum, Labor Notes, December 5, 2017). The OFL ran a parallel campaign – "Make It Fair" – under separate branding, separate staff, and a separate website rather than integrating into F15F, a structural choice that itself documents the institutional

distance between F15F and Ontario labor's peak body. Unions that endorsed the campaign contributed financially and sent members to rallies, but they did not restructure their own organizational operations around the campaign, did not dedicate staff to its coordination, and did not build new cross-sector relationships with each other through it.

This organizational character was not incidental. F15F operated outside union networks by design and by necessity – by design because WAC's organizing methodology centered on reaching non-union precarious workers who were the campaign's primary constituency, and by necessity because Ontario labor's organizational bandwidth was absorbed by sector-specific battles that left no capacity for cross-sector network building. The campaign achieved significant legislative outcomes – Bill 148's minimum wage increase, paid sick days, card-check certification provisions – that union-driven campaigns might not have achieved given those constraints. But the campaign's structural independence from organized labor was simultaneously its operational strength and its analytical limitation for IV2 coding purposes. F15F coordinated organizations in pursuit of a shared legislative objective; it did not build networks among workers. The framework for IV2=Activated requires the latter: durable, rank-and-file cross-sector relational infrastructure, independent of any specific campaign objective, capable of generating mobilization autonomously as circumstances change. The campaign produced no such infrastructure. When Bill 47 reversed F15F's legislative gains in November 2018, what remained was a monthly coordination call and WAC's organizational staff – not a cross-sector worker network capable of converting legislative defeat into escalating mobilization (Karim and Bush, 2018; rankandfile.ca, 2018).

Condition 1 – Workers from More than One Distinct World of Work

The pre-pandemic coordination record in Ontario is defined by sector-specific mobilization within the education employment relationship. ETFO, OSSTF, OECTA, AEFO, and CUPE's school board locals coordinated escalating job actions – work-to-rule campaigns, rotating one-day strikes, and the historic February 21, 2020 joint one-day strike – in response to the Ford government's education policy and compensation demands (CBC News, October 7, 2019; CUPE Ontario, November 27, 2019; OSBCU bulletin, January 17, 2020). All of these organizations share the same employers, workplaces, and provincial bargaining framework. The February 21, 2020 joint strike, while historically unprecedented as the first joint legal strike by Ontario education unions, remained confined entirely to the education employment relationship. No workers from healthcare, transit, municipal government, construction, or any other distinct institutional domain were brought into the coordination as co-participants.

The Bill 124 constitutional challenge brought together a coalition spanning distinct institutional domains: ETFO, OSSTF, ONA, SEIU Healthcare, OPSEU, CUPE Ontario, and the United Steelworkers filed as co-applicants (ONA, 2019; CBC News, September 12, 2022). These organizations represent nurses, teachers, public servants, healthcare workers, and manufacturing workers – workers with different employers, workplaces, and governing legislation. But co-filing a constitutional challenge is not the operational exercise of cross-sector coordination networks. The organizations shared a legal position and collectively instructed lawyers; their members did not coordinate across sector lines in joint action. No new inter-organizational relationships were built

through the litigation. Each union pursued its own bargaining separately throughout the challenge period, and the outcome – wage increases through arbitration and negotiation – was delivered sector by sector, not through any joint cross-sector mechanism.

F15F's cross-sector endorsement coalition – education unions, public service unions, private sector manufacturing and service unions, community organizations – likewise does not establish Condition 1's requirement. The campaign operated outside union networks rather than through them (Bush and Nesbitt, Jacobin, November 22, 2017; Rosenblum, Labor Notes, December 5, 2017). The Unite Here Local 75 campus food service strikes at York University and UTSC in winter 2017 – in which workers from a distinct institutional domain walked off the job under the campaign's banner – are the closest documented instance of workers from genuinely distinct domains acting together, but this was a single union conducting its normal contract bargaining while adopting the campaign's wage demand, not workers from distinct sectors building cross-sector relational infrastructure (Labor Notes, December 2017; Socialist Project, March 2017). The campaign's endorsing unions did not build new working relationships with each other through their participation. Their members did not develop new cross-sector ties. When the campaign went into maintenance mode, no cross-sector organizational residue remained among Ontario's unions. Condition 1 is not met (CBC News, October 7, 2019; CUPE Ontario, November 27, 2019; ONA, 2019; Bush and Nesbitt, Jacobin, November 22, 2017; Rosenblum, Labor Notes, December 5, 2017; Tucker, 2025).

Condition 2 – Agenda Expands Beyond the Scope of a Contract Negotiation

Pre-pandemic coordination in Ontario targeted wages, class sizes, sick days, and working conditions, all within the scope of traditional bargaining. Education sector disputes of 2019-2020 were bargaining disputes: ETFO, OSSTF, OECTA, and CUPE sought higher pay, protections for educational support positions, and class size limits, all within the authority of school board employers to grant through a negotiated agreement (CBC News, October 7, 2019; CUPE Ontario, November 27, 2019).

The Bill 124 constitutional challenge targeted the restoration of collective bargaining's normal scope – not a legislative goal beyond bargaining's reach, but the removal of a statutory constraint on what bargaining could deliver. What the challenge was seeking, and what the courts and arbitrators delivered, was wage increases above one percent: the paradigmatic output of collective agreements (ETFO, 2024; CBC News, November 1, 2023; Tucker, 2025). Sophisticated constitutional advocacy in service of a fundamentally contractual goal does not satisfy Condition 2's requirement that the coordination reach for something no contract could ever produce. Condition 2 is not met (CBC News, October 7, 2019; CUPE Ontario, November 27, 2019; ONA, 2019; ETFO, 2024; Tucker, 2025).

Condition 3 – A Public Political Event Prompting Political Actors Outside the Bargaining Relationship to Respond Publicly

The Ontario government's responses to pre-pandemic education sector disputes were sectoral managerial responses – the Minister of Education acting in the province's capacity as employer, deploying the institutional tools of back-to-work threats and

legislative interventions within the education bargaining framework (CBC News, October 7, 2019). The political actors responding were acting as managers of a sector, not as political figures compelled by cross-sector extra-contractual pressure to take positions on something beyond the immediate dispute.

The contrast with what Condition 3 actually requires is clearest against what the same period produced in Quebec. When Quebec's Alliance Sociale coordinated a constitutional challenge against Bill 78 in May 2012, the Education Minister resigned, emergency legislation passed 68-48 after an all-night legislative session, and every opposition party publicly condemned legislation that had emerged from labor-civil society coordination targeting government policy as policy (Globe and Mail, May 18, 2012). When Quebec's inter-central coalition organized the September 2019 climate march, 500,000 participants placed the Legault government in a position where public response was structurally unavoidable (Labor Notes, October 2019). No Ontario pre-pandemic episode produced a public political crisis of this character – a cross-sector extra-contractual mobilization compelling political actors from entirely outside the employment relationship to take public positions on something beyond the immediate dispute. F15F's Queen's Park rallies drew 3,000 to 5,000 participants and produced political responses, but those responses were to a WAC-anchored political campaign operating outside union networks – not to operationally exercised cross-sector labor coordination of the kind the condition describes (Bush and Nesbitt, Jacobin, November 22, 2017; OFL, 2016). Condition 3 is not met (CBC News, October 7, 2019; Globe and

Mail, May 18, 2012; Labor Notes, October 2019; Tucker, 2025). None of the three conditions are simultaneously satisfied in the pre-pandemic window. IV2 coded: Latent.

The latency coding does not claim that Ontario lacked coordination capacity, organizational infrastructure, or labor movement sophistication. It claims that the cross-sector coordination that occurred before March 2020 – most significantly through F15F – operated through a political campaign anchored at a worker centre rather than through Ontario's organized labor movement, and that this campaign's organizational independence from union networks meant it built no durable rank-and-file cross-sector relational infrastructure. The campaign's own organizers confirmed this independence: it "did not enjoy massive investment from unions," "depended entirely on worker energy and capacity," and deliberately built "independent organizations" rather than integrating into existing union structures (Bush and Nesbitt, Jacobin, November 22, 2017; Ladd, quoted in Rosenblum, Labor Notes, December 5, 2017). Ontario's organized labor was consumed by Bill 124 litigation, Unifor's CLC departure, OFL reunification, and education sector bargaining battles – organizational bandwidth that cross-sector network building would have required but could not access. The result was a labor movement with real organizational capacity, a major political campaign operating at arm's length from that capacity, and no cross-sector coordination network connecting the two.

On the November 2022 CUPE Episode

Tucker (2025) documents a November 2022 CUPE episode requiring direct response here. When the Ford government pre-emptively passed Bill 28 – imposing a contract on CUPE education workers and invoking the notwithstanding clause to override

constitutional labor rights – the CLC, OFL, and unions across all industries rallied behind education workers, planned escalating actions, and committed to a general strike within days, forcing repeal of the legislation within a week. Tucker documents unmistakable cross-sector coordination capacity. This is not disputed.

The anti-circularity protocol governs what this episode can and cannot establish for IV2 coding purposes. November 2022 falls more than two and a half years after the March 2020 pandemic onset. Evidence generated after the cutoff date cannot establish the state of coordination networks before the shock arrived; it can only describe what happened afterward. The November 2022 episode demonstrates that Ontario possessed organizational infrastructure capable of cross-sector coordination and that this infrastructure could be assembled rapidly under sufficient provocation. What it cannot establish is that this infrastructure was operationally exercised for cross-sector mobilization at the moment the pandemic arrived in March 2020. The framework's latency coding does not claim that Ontario lacked coordination capacity. Latency means the structural potential for coordination was not operationally deployed when the shock arrived. Tucker's episode is evidence of reactive capacity; the IV2 coding requires evidence of proactive operational exercise. These are not the same thing, and the distinction is what the anti-circularity protocol exists to enforce.

IV2 Coding: British Columbia

British Columbia's latency coding reflects a mechanism distinct from Ontario's regulatory containment, though it produces the same IV2=Latent outcome. Where Ontario's coordination networks were pushed toward latency by legislative antagonism

consuming organizational bandwidth, BC's networks were redirected toward institutional dialogue by accommodation. The BC NDP government elected in 2017 was formally labor-friendly – the most institutionally sympathetic of the three provincial governments examined in this chapter. That relationship channeled organizational energy toward institutional engagement rather than toward cross-sector extra-institutional mobilization. The result – coordination capacity oriented toward responsive institutional channels rather than toward the kind of extra-contractual, cross-sector action the three conditions require – was achieved not through provocation but through access (Orhierhor et al., 2023). BC's anti-scab legislation (BC Labour Relations Code, s.68, since 1993) provides a legal architecture that raises the credibility of strike action above the Ontario level, but the absence of a statutory common front mechanism means cross-sector coordination lacks the legally institutionalized channel that Quebec's architecture provides.

Condition 1 – Workers from More than One Distinct World of Work

The most significant pre-pandemic labor action in British Columbia involving cross-institutional engagement was the BCTF's 2014 dispute with the provincial government over class sizes and working conditions. The BC Federation of Labour provided financial solidarity to the BCTF: eight affiliates – BCGEU, HEU, COPE 378, PSAC, USW, Unifor, HSA, and FPSE – committed up to $8 million in interest-free loans (CTV News BC, September 10, 2014). Financial solidarity, however, is not cross-sector organizational co-participation. It is one organization providing resources to another without the two organizations coordinating workers from genuinely distinct institutional domains in joint action. BCFL affiliates did not walk out, did not coordinate timing, and

did not pursue joint demands. The BCFL Statement of Solidarity of June 17, 2014, signed by twenty-three union presidents, called on members to "bolster the picket lines" and write to the Premier – it did not call for a sympathy strike (BCFL, June 17, 2014). BCFL President Jim Sinclair kept the option of broader action open throughout the dispute without exercising it; as Klein, MacLeod, and Kilian documented contemporaneously, Sinclair "responded by keeping the option open, not ruling out a general strike but not calling for one either" (The Tyee, September 19, 2014). CUPE K–12 support workers – custodians, educational assistants, and bus drivers – declined to cross BCTF picket lines, but these workers share the same school board employers and worksites as BCTF members; their action was intra-sector, not cross-sector (Times Colonist, 2014). The Georgia Straight observed at the dispute's conclusion that BCNU's $500,000 outright donation was notable precisely because "the most other unions would do was provide interest-free loans" (Georgia Straight, September 19, 2014). Tara Ehrcke, past-president of the Greater Victoria Teachers' Association, characterized the absence of sympathy strikes as "one of the tragic failures in this dispute" and "a continuation of the trend that sees joint labour action moribund" (Ehrcke, socialist.ca, September 26, 2014). The 2014 dispute remained within the education employment relationship throughout. The contrast with 2005 is analytically decisive: in that dispute approximately 40,000 CUPE municipal and university workers walked off the job in a one-day sympathy strike across genuinely distinct institutional domains – constituting the kind of transgressive cross-sector solidarity that Condition 1 requires and that 2014 explicitly failed to reproduce (Camfield, Capital & Class, 2009).

The Federation of Post-Secondary Educators of BC represents a potential site of cross-institutional coordination among post-secondary faculty across BC's college and university sector. However, the formation of meaningful multi-union collaborative infrastructure in the BC post-secondary sector – bringing together FPSE, CUFA BC, BCGEU Component 7, BCITFSA, and MoveUP/COPE-SEPB Local 378 in joint sector-wide action – occurred during the pandemic period itself, not before it. The BC Post-Secondary Education Sector Group was formally constituted on May 11, 2021, when its founding organizations met jointly with Provincial Health Officer Bonnie Henry to address return-to-campus planning; the joint release characterized this as "the first conversation of its kind with the union groups and BC public health officials," establishing that the coalition was new (FPSE.ca, May 11, 2021). The relationships that would eventually produce this sector group were not yet constituted as operational cross-sector coordination at the March 2020 cutoff. Condition 1 is not met.

Condition 2 – Goals Expand Beyond Scope of a Contract Negotiation

BC's pre-pandemic labor coordination targeted class size, teacher wages, and working conditions – outcomes within the existing bargaining framework that contract negotiation can and does produce. The Better Can Happen Here campaign, launched at the 57th BCFED Convention on November 30, 2016, is the pre-pandemic episode most likely to satisfy Condition 2, and requires direct engagement. The campaign targeted a change of provincial government – a goal that no employer's signature on a collective agreement could deliver. On that basis alone, Condition 2 might appear to be met.

The campaign does not satisfy Condition 2 because it did not constitute cross-sector coordination among workers. The BCFED's own launch press release describes it as a campaign that "combines television and radio advertising, a digital strategy, and voter engagement"; the campaign's first act was an advertisement that "premiered for delegates at the BCFED's 57th convention in Vancouver this afternoon" and went "to air tonight on television newscasts" (BCFED, November 30, 2016). Better Can Happen Here was a media campaign run through the BCFED's existing organizational apparatus – unions pooling resources to produce and broadcast advertising – not workers from distinct sectors coordinating. Here, coordination is absent at the worker level.

After the NDP's electoral victory in May 2017, BCFED activity moved into an insider advocacy mode consistent with access to a labor-friendly government. BCFED pursued Labour Code reform through formal written submissions to the government-struck Labour Relations Code Review Panel (BCFED, March 21, 2018) and direct lobbying rather than through cross-sector public mobilization. New BCFED President Laird Cronk's assessment of the resulting Bill 30 captured the orientation: "We have a government that actually consulted before they made changes to the labour code and the Employment Standards Act. That's refreshing" (Cronk, quoted in The Tyee, May 1, 2019). No evidence of BCFL-coordinated cross-sector mobilization campaigns targeting provincial legislation was identified for the 2017-2019 period. Condition 2 is not met.

Condition 3 – A Public Political Event Prompting Political Actors Outside the Bargaining Relationship to Respond Publicly

No public political event of the type Condition 3 requires was identified for British Columbia in the pre-pandemic period. The 2014 BCTF dispute produced a Supreme Court of Canada ruling on the constitutional right to bargain collectively – a significant legal outcome – but it was a judicial response to a constitutional rights claim brought within the legal system, not a political response to a cross-sector extra-contractual labor mobilization (British Columbia Teachers' Federation v. British Columbia, 2016 SCC 49). Better Can Happen Here produced a change of government in May 2017, but as established above, the campaign was a media operation rather than a cross-sector labor mobilization, and the political response it produced was an electoral outcome rather than political actors being compelled to respond to extra-contractual worker coordination of the kind the condition describes. No evidence was identified of a BC labor action in the pre-pandemic period compelling political actors from outside the relevant employment relationship to respond publicly to cross-sector extra-contractual mobilization in the way Condition 3 requires.

III. Process Traces.

Part II established the IV1 and IV2 codings for all three provinces and developed the evidentiary basis for each. Part III traces the mechanism through which each province's specific conjunction of conditions produced its observed outcome. The governing question throughout is how the combination of conditions produced the

outcome through the particular organizational pathway that each province's pre-pandemic history makes available.

For Quebec, the trace establishes that premature rollback encountered coordination networks whose relational infrastructure had been operationally exercised across the preceding decade, enabling the grievance to propagate through pre-existing channels into a sustained, cross-sector wave.

For Ontario and British Columbia, the trace establishes that an identical grievance, absent operationally exercised cross-sector coordination infrastructure, produced sectoral rather than wave-level responses.

Quebec: Activated Networks Encounter Escalated Grievance

The process of mobilization in Quebec was not new. Quebec's post-COVID wave was the latest iteration of a coordination practice whose relational infrastructure had been continuously exercised – through non-raiding pacts stretching back to 2008, through two Common Front bargaining rounds in 2010 and 2015, through joint legal and political campaigns in the intervening inter-round periods, through the Lutte Commune climate action in September 2019, through the April 2019 solidarity protocol signed by five organizations in lieu of a formal Common Front, and through the joint public campaigns of 2020 and 2021. When the Canada Recovery Benefit expired on October 23, 2021 and real wages began their post-pandemic decline into an inflationary environment the federal government had not waited to resolve, the grievance met an organizational capacity that was already live. The wave is the output of that encounter.

The process trace establishes this claim in three sequential steps that correspond to the three analytical goals of this section:

- First, it documents the pre-pandemic coordination record from 2008 through early 2020, establishing that inter-central networks were operationally exercised across the decade through multiple channels and in multiple domains beyond formal Common Front bargaining.
- Second, it documents the post-pandemic mobilization of those same organizations, tracing both the pre-wave grievance period of 2021–22 and the 2022–23 Common Front wave itself.
- Third, it establishes causal continuity between the two: through union leaders' explicit framing of the 2022 reconstitution as historical inheritance, through documented negative learning from the 2020 fragmented round, and through the structural logic – identified by analysts close to the movement – that the centralized bargaining system itself generates recurring Common Front formations from the same relational substrate.

Pre-Pandemic Coordination Record, 2008-2020

Non-raiding pacts and the 2009-2010 Common Front: The inter-central coordination infrastructure of the pre-pandemic decade was built on a foundation laid in 2008 and 2009. On October 26, 2008, the CSN and FTQ signed a bilateral non-raiding agreement covering the upcoming public-sector bargaining round, which La Presse reported the following day as unprecedented (La Presse, October 27, 2008). CSN president Claudette Carbonneau stated: "On envoie un message clair au gouvernement et au patronat: ne comptez pas sur la division!" ["We are sending a clear message to the

government and employers: don't count on division!"] (Carbonneau, cited in La Presse, October 27, 2008). FTQ president Michel Arsenault said: "On est mieux de faire ça ensemble au lieu de se chicaner avant d'aller à table" ["We're better off doing this together instead of squabbling before we get to the table"] (Arsenault, cited in La Presse, October 27, 2008). This bilateral pact was dramatically expanded on May 11, 2009, when seven organizations – CSN, FTQ, CSQ, FIQ, SFPQ, APTS, and SPGQ – announced a historic Common Front for the 2010 bargaining round, representing 475,000 workers (Le Soleil, May 11, 2009; SCFP press release, May 11, 2009). Carbonneau described the non-raiding protocol as "du jamais-vu dans l'histoire syndicale québécoise" ["unprecedented in Quebec union history"] (Carbonneau, cited in Le Soleil, May 11, 2009). Arsenault added: "Quand on arrive à une table de négociations, déchirés entre nous, le grand gagnant est de l'autre bord de la table" ["When we arrive at a negotiating table divided among ourselves, the big winner is on the other side of the table"] (Arsenault, cited in Le Soleil, May 11, 2009).

The 2010 Common Front, representing 475,000 workers across CSN, FTQ, and SISP affiliates, concluded via a negotiated agreement – described by Radio-Canada as "la première fois depuis 1999" ["the first time since 1999"] that public-sector negotiations concluded without special legislation (Radio-Canada, June 2010). The settlement provided a minimum 7% over five years, with potential increases up to 10.5% through inflation and economic-growth clauses (Radio-Canada, June 2010). The FIQ's post-settlement experience within this round reveals the friction that would shape subsequent inter-organizational choices: after the intersectoral agreement was signed, the FIQ was

left to pursue sectoral working-condition demands without active support from the other Common Front members, leading sociologist Rolande Pinard to characterize the situation as "La FIQ a été abandonnée par les autres membres du Front commun (CSN, FTQ, SISP), retournés vaquer à leurs occupations habituelles" ["The FIQ was abandoned by the other Common Front members (CSN, FTQ, SISP), who returned to their usual business"] (Pinard, Revue Relations, No. 824, November 2010). This experience of abandonment shaped the FIQ's subsequent decisions to negotiate outside the formal Common Front coalition, and the 2019 solidarity protocol's explicit commitment to mutual support without demanding joint bargaining directly addressed the institutional lesson the FIQ drew from 2010.

The 2012 Alliance Sociale and extra-contractual inter-union mobilization

The 2012 Maple Spring student strike activated the pre-existing Alliance Sociale – a coalition comprising FTQ, CSN, CSQ, CSD, SFPQ, APTS, SPGQ, FECQ, and FEUQ – for joint extra-contractual political mobilization. On April 19, 2012, the Alliance Sociale jointly demanded the government negotiate with all student organizations without exception and denounced police violence as state-sanctioned (CSQ press release, April 19, 2012). On May 25, 2012, over 70 organizations including FTQ, CSN, CSQ, CSD, APTS, FIQ, SFPQ, and SPGQ filed two constitutional challenges against Bill 78 before the Quebec Superior Court – a joint legal action spanning the full range of public-sector union organizations (CSQ press release, May 25, 2012). The coordination was deliberate and joint in its declaratory and legal dimensions, even as union leaders explicitly declined

to call solidarity strikes or encourage industrial civil disobedience (Renaud and de Grosbois, Rank and File, 2024).

The analytical significance of the 2012 mobilization for the dissertation's argument is that it demonstrates a recurring pattern: inter-central networks producing joint coordination in the extra-contractual domain – political mobilization, legal action, public positioning on government policy – independently of whether a formal Common Front was constituted at the bargaining table. The same organizations that coordinated at the bargaining table in 2010 and 2015 coordinated in a fundamentally different domain in 2012, using the same relational infrastructure for a different purpose. This is the pattern the 2019 Lutte Commune climate action repeats, and the pattern that Boyer's April 2019 statement – "on sait qu'on aura des batailles à mener ensemble" ["we know we will have battles to fight together"] – anticipates (Boyer, cited in Radio-Canada, April 24, 2019).

Refusons l'austérité and the 2015 Common Front round

The Couillard Liberal government's austerity program (2014-2016) produced another wave of inter-central extra-contractual coordination. The Refusons l'austérité collectif, announced November 2, 2014, rapidly grew to approximately 40 organizations spanning union, community, environmental, feminist, and student sectors, with core central membership including CSN, FTQ, CSQ, CSD, APTS, SFPQ, and SPGQ (CSN press release, 2014; The Militant, December 22, 2014). The November 29, 2014 marches in Montreal and Quebec City, organized by the collectif, drew organizer-reported figures exceeding 125,000 combined participants – over 25,000 in Quebec City and over 100,000 in Montreal – with FTQ president Daniel Boyer speaking at the main demonstration

(CSN press release, November 29, 2014; Radio-Canada, November 29, 2014). The Coalition Main Rouge organized a parallel march of approximately 40,000–50,000 in Montreal on October 31, 2014 (Radio-Canada, October 31, 2014; RCCQ, October 2014).

The 2015 Common Front reunited CSQ, CSN, FTQ, and SISP affiliates (SFPQ and APTS; FIQ negotiated independently), representing 400,000 workers (CSQ, December 9, 2015). A national strike day on December 9, 2015 preceded a settlement on December 17, 2015, providing approximately 9.15% in salary increases, with CSN president Jacques Létourneau calculating total compensation gains at approximately 10.25% over five years (CSN, December 2015; FNEEQ information bulletin, January 7, 2016). The 2015 round was – like the 2010 round – a negotiated settlement without special legislation: two consecutive rounds concluded through inter-central coordination at the bargaining table, building organizational memory of what joint action can achieve.

Joint policy campaigns 2016-2020

Between the 2015 Common Front settlement and the onset of the pandemic, the major centrales maintained inter-organizational coordination through joint policy campaigns operating entirely outside the bargaining framework. The $15/hour minimum wage movement involved overlapping campaigns launched independently by FTQ (May 1, 2016) and through the '5-10-15' coalition comprising CSN, CSQ, CSD, and others (October 2016), which converged into the umbrella 'Campagnes unies pour la hausse du salaire minimum à 15$' by 2017 (FTQ, May 1, 2016; CTI, February 3, 2018). By December 2, 2018, a formal joint declaration supporting $15/hour had been signed by 114 groups including all major centrales (Radio-Canada, December 2, 2018). The 'La

pièce manquante' pharmacare campaign was jointly launched by CSN and FTQ presidents Daniel Boyer and Jacques Létourneau on September 9, 2018, subsequently expanded to include CSQ and CSD, and supported by a joint letter in Le Droit co-signed by FTQ, CSN, CSQ, FIQ, APTS, and civil society partners (FTQ, September 9, 2018; CSN, September 9, 2018; FTQ, March 1, 2019).

The most proximate pre-pandemic coordination event was the January 15, 2020 pay equity Superior Court challenge. CSN, CSQ, and FTQ jointly filed a constitutional challenge against three modifications to the Loi sur l'équité salariale enacted by the Legault government in April 2019, arguing the amendments failed to comply with a 2018 Supreme Court of Canada ruling that had invalidated portions of the Act (FTQ, January 15, 2020; CSN, January 15, 2020; CSQ, January 15, 2020; Newswire, January 15, 2020). Boyer, Senneville, and Éthier appeared as joint spokespersons. Boyer stated: "le gouvernement doit comprendre que la discrimination à l'endroit des travailleuses ne peut plus durer" ["the government must understand that discrimination against women workers can no longer continue"] (Boyer, cited in FTQ, January 15, 2020). This filing, occurring fewer than eleven weeks before the pandemic lockdown, constitutes the final documented pre-pandemic act of joint inter-central legal coordination – the same CSN, FTQ, and CSQ that would negotiate separately at the bargaining table were simultaneously mounting joint litigation on a legislative matter, operating in different domains through the same relational infrastructure.

The 2019-2020 non-Common Front as coordinated accommodation

The decision not to form a Common Front for the 2019-2020 bargaining round was a deliberate strategic accommodation of legitimately divergent organizational interests, not a breakdown in attempted coordination. Radio-Canada confirmed this with the explicit verb: these centrales 'qui ont décidé de ne pas former de front commun, cette année – ont tout de même signé un pacte de non-maraudage' ["who decided not to form a common front this year – nonetheless signed a non-raiding pact"] (Radio-Canada, October 24, 2019). The choice was coordinated: the five organizations that reached the April 24, 2019 solidarity protocol – CSN, FTQ, CSQ, FIQ, and APTS – agreed collectively on a mutual non-raiding commitment, agreed collectively to concentrate energy on member-specific bargaining priorities, and agreed collectively not to use raiding threats to force participation in a coalition structure that served some members' interests less well than others (Radio-Canada, April 24, 2019).

The structural reasoning behind the accommodation was explicit. Presse-toi à gauche diagnosed the underlying dynamic: "les centrales n'ont plus le rapport de force pour briser la croissance des organisations syndicales qui se définissent par rapport à l'identité professionnelle de leurs membres" ["the federations no longer have the power balance to break the growth of union organizations that define themselves around the professional identity of their members"] (Presse-toi à gauche, June 4, 2019). The FIQ and APTS had built their organizational identities and membership around profession-based organizing models that had proven effective in the 2017 health-sector raiding period. Compelling them to subordinate those identities to a multi-sector common front would

have required coercion the centrales could not sustain and chose not to attempt. The protocol itself acknowledged this: “Les centrales n’ont pas jugé nécessaire d’utiliser la menace d’un maraudage comme levier” [“The federations did not find it necessary to use the threat of raiding as leverage”] (Presse-toi à gauche, June 4, 2019). The accommodation was mutual, deliberate, and achieved through the same inter-central coordination infrastructure that produced joint Common Fronts in 2010 and 2015.

FTQ president Boyer’s explanation captures both the accommodation logic and the maintained solidarity underneath it. “On a cru bon de jouer ça calmement et ne pas se marauder entre nous” [“We thought it best to play it calmly and not raid each other”] (Boyer, cited in Radio-Canada, April 24, 2019). Boyer was explicit that separate tables did not mean separate interests: “Si on ne négocie pas à la même table, il n’en demeure pas moins qu’on va négocier avec le même employeur… on sait qu’on aura des batailles à mener ensemble” [“Even if we don’t negotiate at the same table, we will nonetheless be negotiating with the same employer… we know we will have battles to fight together”] (Boyer, cited in Radio-Canada, April 24, 2019). CSQ president Sonia Éthier framed the decision as redirecting energy from inter-organizational competition toward bargaining preparation: “Plutôt que de mettre toute notre énergie à se déployer sur le terrain pour faire valoir nos organisations, on pense que c’est vraiment un signal important à donner au gouvernement” [“Rather than putting all our energy into mobilizing in the field to promote our organizations, we think it is truly an important signal to send to the government”] (Éthier, cited in Radio-Canada, April 24, 2019).

The April 2019 solidarity protocol's unprecedented character itself demonstrates the robustness of the coordination infrastructure. Five organizations signed a non-raiding pact decoupled from any formal Common Front agreement for the first time in Quebec labor history: "C'est la première fois qu'un pacte de solidarité n'est pas attaché à une entente de négociation en front commun" ["It is the first time a solidarity pact has not been attached to a common front bargaining agreement"] (Presse-toi à gauche, June 4, 2019; Anti-K, June 18, 2019). In every prior round where such pacts had existed, they had been embedded within the formal Common Front structure. The 2019 protocol demonstrated that the coordination infrastructure had matured to the point where it could produce and formalize solidarity commitments independently of the formal bargaining coalition. Networks robust enough to innovate new inter-organizational instruments even in a round without a formal Common Front are not networks that require the Common Front to survive.

The Lutte Commune network provided parallel cross-federation connective tissue throughout this period. The network's core of approximately fifteen individuals drawn from APTS, CSN, FAE, FIQ, and FTQ (Lutte Commune, 'À propos,' luttecommune.org) operated in the extra-contractual domain of shared progressive politics and rank-and-file organizing strategy, not formal inter-central bargaining coordination. Its September 27, 2019 climate action – documented in Part 2 as the IV2 anchor – drew participants from across its five member federations into a joint political action targeting climate legislation, satisfying all three IV2 activation conditions and doing so in the same month the CSQ deposited its demands for the fragmented bargaining round (Radio-Canada,

October 24, 2019). The simultaneous fragmentation at the bargaining table and activation in the extra-contractual domain is precisely what Boyer had anticipated: different battles, same relational infrastructure, different organizational forms appropriate to each.

Pandemic-Induced Mobilization, 2020-2023

November 2020: Eight organizations act jointly without a Common Front. On November 25, 2020, eight public-sector union organizations – CSN, CSQ, FIQ, APTS, FTQ, FAE, SFPQ, and SPGQ – representing more than 500,000 workers conducted a joint 'action de visibilité' at two simultaneous locations: the foot of the Jacques-Cartier Bridge in Montreal and Place George-V in Quebec City (FTQ communiqué, November 25, 2020; CSQ, November 25, 2020). Leaders present included Jacques Létourneau (CSN), Sonia Éthier (CSQ), Nancy Bédard (FIQ), Andrée Poirier (APTS), Daniel Boyer (FTQ), Sylvain Mallette (FAE), Christian Daigle (SFPQ), and Line Lamarre (SPGQ) – the full leadership of all major public-sector organizations acting together (FTQ communiqué, November 25, 2020). The joint demand was for the government to table concrete bargaining offers on collective agreements that had expired on March 31, 2020, and had seen no meaningful movement in nearly eight months of stalled negotiations (L'actualité, November 25, 2020). L'actualité's coverage explicitly noted: "Bien qu'il n'y ait pas de front commun, cette fois-ci…" ["Although there is no common front this time…"] – confirming the joint action occurred without formal coalition infrastructure (L'actualité, November 25, 2020). Eight organizations, with the same presidents who had agreed in April 2019 not to raid each other and not to form a Common Front, acting

together in public political space. The networks were producing coordination outcomes regardless of the formal bargaining structure.

May 2021: Joint advertising campaign

On May 12, 2021, four organizations – APTS, CSN, CSQ, and FTQ – representing nearly 400,000 workers jointly launched a major advertising campaign under the theme Sans nous, il n'y a plus de services publics ["Without us, there are no more public services"], denouncing the government's "faussetés" ["falsehoods"] and the insufficiency of its 5% wage offer – described as "les mêmes offres présentées par Québec en décembre 2019" ["the same offers presented by Quebec in December 2019"] (APTS, CSN, CSQ, FTQ joint communiqué, Newswire, May 12, 2021). The campaign ran on radio, television, print, and digital platforms (APTS, CSN, CSQ, FTQ joint communiqué, Newswire, May 12, 2021). This is the same four of the five April 2019 protocol signatories – still operating through inter-central coordination in the public political domain, two years after the non-Common Front decision and eighteen months into the pandemic, using the same joint-action capacity the 2008-2015 period had built.

2021 pre-wave disputes: acute grievance before formal reconstitution

Three disputes in 2021 establish that both conditions for the wave were developing before the formal Common Front reconstituted. In April 2021, approximately 1,150 meatpacking workers at Olymel's Vallée-Jonction plant struck for four months, demanding wage restoration after a devastating 38 percent pay cut dating to 2007 – nearly two decades of accumulated wage losses that post-pandemic conditions rendered newly intolerable (The Militant, July 16, 2021). Labor Minister Jean Boulet's public

response established the CAQ government's posture: declaring on August 2, 2021 that 'this needs to end. A labor dispute of this nature cannot be tolerated in Québec' (The Militant, July 16, 2021), while simultaneously declining to introduce back-to-work legislation. The convening of a 'last chance meeting' on August 25 created an atmosphere in which the union leadership felt compelled to push through a barely improved second agreement, prompting workers to describe fighting 'against the employer, against the union, against the CNTU, against the producers' (Montreal Gazette, August 24, 2021).

In June 2021, the APTS conducted strike days on June 7, 8, 21, and 22 after negotiations stalled (APTS, May 19, 2021). The pandemic had exposed the systemic character of the staffing crisis to which the APTS had been trying to draw attention: the deployment of Canadian Armed Forces to long-term care facilities in spring 2020 had made visible what chronic understaffing and mandatory overtime had produced over years of accumulation. APTS vice-president Benoit Audet stated: 'Premier Legault and the Treasury Board president are responsible for the deterioration of the work climate in our institutions' (APTS, May 19, 2021). Despite Legault's May 2 announcement of 'intensified negotiations,' there was no meaningful movement at the bargaining table (APTS, May 19, 2021).

In November and December 2021, approximately 11,000 daycare workers affiliated with the CSN launched strikes after their collective agreements had expired more than 18 months earlier without renewal (Child Care Canada, November 21, 2021; Montreal CityNews, December 11, 2021). The central grievance was salary disparity:

support staff earned 20 to 35 percent less than comparable positions in other public sectors (Global News, November 30, 2021). Under sustained pressure, the government agreed to salary increases of 18 percent for educators and 8 to 12.5 percent for support staff over three years, plus a 3 percent pandemic bonus (Montreal CityNews, December 11, 2021; CBC, December 11, 2021). These three 2021 disputes document the triggering condition – acute post-pandemic grievance – materializing across Quebec's labor landscape before the formal wave mechanism engaged.

Causal Links and Organizational Continuity

Reconstitution framed as historical inheritance: The April 3, 2022 Common Front announcement was dated and framed with deliberate historical intentionality. The three centrales noted explicitly that the announcement 'coïncide avec le 50e anniversaire de la formation du premier front commun de 1972' ["coincides with the 50th anniversary of the formation of the first common front of 1972"] (FTQ communiqué, April 3, 2022; Radio-Canada, April 2, 2022). The frontcommun.org website presents the 2022–23 Common Front under the heading 'Une alliance avec des origines historiques' and opens:

> Cinquante ans après la formation du premier Front commun en 1972, la Confédération des syndicats nationaux (CSN), la Centrale des syndicats du Québec (CSQ), la Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec (FTQ) et l'Alliance du personnel professionnel et technique de la santé et des services sociaux (APTS) unissent leurs forces afin de négocier en alliance"
>
> ["Fifty years after the formation of the first Common Front in 1972, the Confédération des syndicats nationaux (CSN), the Centrale des syndicats du

> Québec (CSQ), the Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec (FTQ) and the Alliance du personnel professionnel et technique de la santé et des services sociaux (APTS) are joining forces to negotiate together"] (frontcommun.org, 2022; frontcommun.org/home-2/, 2022).

This is not symbolic: it positions the 2022 reconstitution as organizational inheritance, not organizational construction. CSN first vice-president and lead negotiator François Enault provided the most explicit biographical continuity statement: "En 1972, j'avais six ans, ma mère était enseignante et je participais aux assemblées du premier Front commun. Le slogan de l'époque, 'Nous, le monde ordinaire', est devenu 'Nous, d'une seule voix'" ["In 1972, I was six years old, my mother was a teacher and I attended the assemblies of the first Common Front. The slogan of the time, 'We, ordinary people,' became 'We, with one voice'"] (Enault, cited in Le Devoir, November 2022). Enault's presence as lead negotiator in 2022–23 – the man whose mother was a teacher in the 1972 Common Front – makes the organizational continuity literal as well as institutional. The same centrales, reconstituting the same form of coalition, negotiated by someone whose first encounter with the Common Front was as a six-year-old at his mother's union assembly.

Negative learning from 2020 as direct causal mechanism

The 2020 fragmented round's inadequate outcomes are explicitly identified by union actors and analysts as a direct causal factor in the 2022 reconstitution. La Presse reported in September 2022 that during the preceding round 'il n'y avait pas eu de front commun intersyndical. Et cela a sans doute joué dans le fait que la négociation s'était

éternisée, avec des demandes disparates' ["there had been no intersyndical common front. And that undoubtedly played a role in the fact that the negotiations dragged on, with disparate demands"] (La Presse, September 28, 2022). The government's offer of 5% over three years, unchanged from December 2019 through May 2021 despite pandemic conditions (APTS, CSN, CSQ, FTQ joint communiqué, Newswire, May 12, 2021), was rendered immediately inadequate when CPI reached 6.8% in 2022. The purchasing-power implications were clear in real time, and union leaders cited them explicitly as motivation for reconstituting the Common Front rather than repeating the fragmented approach. The CSN's own retrospective described the 2022 formation as arising from federations that 'viennent à peine de reprendre leur souffle de la négociation précédente' ["barely catching their breath from the previous negotiation"] and quickly concluded 'l'idée de se regrouper est vite évoquée' ["the idea of regrouping was quickly raised"] (CSN, csn.qc.ca, 2024).

Benoit Renaud's analysis captures the negative learning specifically. The FAE, having bargained independently 'from 2010 all the way to 2020,' concluded their 2020 round 'with a triumphalist attitude which may have led them to overestimate their ability to win on their own' – because they misread why they had obtained a reasonable result in 2020: the government had concluded things amicably not because FAE's independent strategy was effective but because 'we have the pandemic to deal with and can't do everything at the same time' and 'it's going to be only a three year agreement' (Renaud, Tempest Magazine, July 2, 2024). The 2023 Common Front's demand architecture directly addressed this lesson: rather than fixed-percentage increases that inflation would

immediately erode, the Common Front demanded inflation-indexed wages plus additional increases explicitly designed to restore the purchasing power the prior settlement had failed to protect.

Structural Path Dependence: Centralized Bargaining System Generates Recurrent Common Fronts

Thomas Collombat provides the deepest analytical account of continuity. The Common Front is, in his analysis, 'une conséquence logique du système de négociation centralisé du secteur public québécois mis en place à partir des années 1960' ["a logical consequence of the centralized public-sector bargaining system established in Quebec from the 1960s onwards"] – an institutional form that the centralized bargaining system itself generates recurrently, because the structural conditions that make coordinated bargaining advantageous are present in every round (Collombat, À bâbord!, No. 100, Summer 2024). The first Common Front in 1971–72 was not an accident; every subsequent one follows from the same logic. Collombat also identifies the grassroots inter-union networks – naming Lutte Commune specifically – that push centrale leadership toward more combative strategies between formal bargaining cycles, sustaining the organizational culture that makes reconstitution possible (Collombat, À bâbord!, Summer 2024). The coordination infrastructure is not merely formal and institutional; it has a rank-and-file dimension that persists continuously across bargaining rounds.

The speed of the April 2022 reconstitution is itself causal evidence. Reconstituting a Common Front requires complex multi-federation negotiations over

shared demand structures, joint strategy, coordinated escalation protocols, and non-raiding commitments. The April 2022 announcement came less than a year after the FTQ's 2021 settlement and well before the formal bargaining round opened. This speed is consistent only with relational infrastructure that had been maintained through the 2019-2020 fragmented round and the pandemic period – maintained through the solidarity protocol of April 2019 (Radio-Canada, April 24, 2019), through the joint legal action of January 2020 (FTQ, January 15, 2020), through the joint November 2020 visibility action (FTQ communiqué, November 25, 2020), and through the May 2021 joint advertising campaign (APTS, CSN, CSQ, FTQ joint communiqué, Newswire, May 12, 2021). It is not consistent with an organizational infrastructure being rebuilt from scratch.

APTS direct membership as structural innovation from accumulated partnership

The 2022–23 Common Front's unique configuration also provides continuity evidence. APTS joined as a direct Common Front member for the first time, rather than participating through the SISP umbrella as in prior rounds (Collombat, À bâbord!, Summer 2024). APTS president Robert Comeau stated explicitly: "C'est la première fois qu'un syndicat indépendant en fait partie en son nom propre, avec les centrales syndicales" ["It is the first time an independent union has been part of it in its own name, alongside the union federations"] (Comeau, cited in APTS communiqué, September 28, 2022; Newswire, September 28, 2022). Comeau connected this directly to accumulated partnership: "Il est déjà arrivé que le front commun soit élargi, avec le Secrétariat intersyndical des services publics, dans les années 2005-2009. Le SISP comptait lui-

même plusieurs organisations syndicales, dont l'APTS. Cette fois-ci, l'APTS est un partenaire à parts égales" ["It has happened before that the common front was expanded, with the Secrétariat intersyndical des services publics, in the years 2005-2009. The SISP itself included several union organizations, including the APTS. This time, the APTS is an equal partner"] (La Presse, September 28, 2022). The APTS's trajectory – from SISP-mediated participation in 2009–10, to bilateral alliance with FIQ in 2019-20, to direct Common Front member in 2022–23 – traces a path of deepening inter-organizational partnership built on accumulated rounds of coordination, including the April 2019 solidarity protocol that the APTS signed alongside the centrales while maintaining its separate bargaining table.

The Wave: 2022–23 Common Front Escalation

The 2023 Common Front public sector strikes constituted one of the largest labor actions in North American history, mobilizing 420,000 workers across education, healthcare, and social services through a structured escalation sequence that propagated through the pre-existing coordination infrastructure rather than building it in real time (Renaud, Tempest Magazine, July 2, 2024; Labor Notes, January 2024; Jacobin, January 25, 2024). The demand architecture reflected the lesson of the fragmented 2019-2020 round: rather than fixed-percentage increases that inflation would immediately erode, the Common Front demanded inflation-indexed wages plus additional increases – a structure explicitly designed to restore the purchasing power that the prior settlement had failed to protect (Renaud, Tempest Magazine, October 24, 2023).

The government's initial position was a 9 percent wage increase over five years – effectively a real wage cut at the prevailing inflation rate – subsequently revised to 10.3 percent (Renaud, Tempest Magazine, October 24, 2023). Both offers were unanimously rejected. Workers voted 95 percent in favor of strike mandates, demonstrating the depth of rank-and-file authorization before any escalation began (CUPE, December 7, 2023; CBC, September 22, 2023).The organizational readiness that would animate the strike calendar was already visible in September 2023. On September 23, over 100,000 public-sector workers and supporters marched through downtown Montreal – the largest labor demonstration in Quebec in years – while leaders of all four Common Front organizations addressed the crowd (CBC, September 22, 2023; Jacobin, January 25, 2024). François Enault (CSN first vice-president) gave voice to the rank-and-file mood directly: "People are angry", he said of the government's offer (Enault, cited in CTV News / Canadian Press, September 23, 2023). APTS president Robert Comeau was explicit about the organizational state: "We don't hope to get there, but it's a last resort. Our people are ready" (Comeau, cited in Ricochet Media, March 15, 2024, citing Canadian Press, September 2023). The declaration captures what the prior decade of coordination had produced: 420,000 workers in a condition of organizational readiness before the formal escalation calendar had even begun. A coalition without that relational substrate does not arrive at a march of this scale with this degree of leadership alignment. The march was not the wave – it was the demonstration that the infrastructure capable of producing the wave was live.

The escalation followed the Common Front's pre-established coordination calendar. On November 6 through 9, the Common Front conducted an initial three-day strike – 420,000 workers across education, healthcare, and social services simultaneously off the job. On November 23, the Fédération autonome de l'enseignement (FAE) – formed from a split within the main teachers' union in 2006 and never having participated in a Common Front (Renaud, Tempest Magazine, July 2, 2024) – launched an unlimited strike that would last over a month, shutting down 800 schools. The FAE's decision to coordinate timing and demands with the Common Front despite formal independence demonstrates that the coordination infrastructure's reach extended beyond formal Common Front membership through the broader relational network that Quebec's labor culture maintains. From December 8 through 14, the Common Front conducted a seven-day strike (SCFP, December 8, 2023). From December 10 through 13, the FIQ – representing 80,000 nurses, their first strike in 25 years – conducted a parallel four-day strike, coordinating timing with the broader mobilization (CBC, December 10, 2023). November alone produced two million strike days (Renaud, Tempest Magazine, July 2, 2024). Quebec's 2023 work stoppages – 690–691 in total – broke the previous record of 384 set in 1974 (IEDM, 2025), and Quebec's person-days lost reached 4.6 million, eleven times the prior five-year average (CUPE, September 13, 2024).

The final agreements, reached December 27–28, 2023, provided 17.4 percent salary increases over five years, with 6 percent in the first year, plus additional gains for newer teachers and improvements to working conditions (frontcommun.org; Renaud, Tempest Magazine, July 2, 2024; Ottawa CityNews, December 28, 2023; CBC,

December 28, 2023). The Common Front ratification vote passed at 74.8 percent (APTS, 2024). The settlement was not universally celebrated as a triumph. Pak-Kei Wong, a rank-and-file education advisor who had spent fifteen years in contractual positions before joining his union and had become active in the mobilization, offered the honest assessment of someone who had lived the process from below: “It’s definitely not everything we had hoped for, but I think that’s the case in any [negotiation]” (Wong, cited in Ricochet Media, March 15, 2024). That ambivalence is itself analytically significant: the gap between activist aspiration and institutional outcome is precisely what the activation-sequencing framework does not promise to close. What the activated network produced was not the maximum possible outcome but the maximum achievable through coordinated industrial action within the institutional constraints of Quebec labor law – 17.4 percent against an offer that started at 9 percent and had not moved from 5 percent over three years for the two years prior. Against the government’s unchanged offer that stood from December 2019 through May 2021 (APTS, CSN, CSQ, FTQ joint communiqué, Newswire, May 12, 2021), the coordinated Common Front produced a settlement nearly 3.5 times larger through a mechanism that the government’s divide-and-conquer strategy – documented by François Enault as one the government ‘attempted... to divide the coalition by negotiating separately with different union groups’ (CSN, January 7, 2024) – was structurally unable to defeat.

The Network’s Reach Beyond Its Formal Membership: FIQ 2024

The FIQ nurses’ situation following the December 2023 Common Front settlement demonstrates both the reach and the limits of the coordination network, and

adds an important qualification to the wave narrative. The 80,000 FIQ nurses were not formally part of the Common Front settlement and continued bargaining into 2024 after the Common Front agreements were reached (Health Coalition, undated). After eight days of strikes and over 500 days of negotiations, the FIQ faced a government whose intransigence on nurse scheduling and placement had not softened with the Common Front settlement.

In April 2024, nurses rejected a government offer by 61 percent – an offer that included below-inflation wages and expanded management powers to transfer nurses between institutions against their preferences. The CAQ government, under Health Minister Christian Dubé and Premier Legault, refused to compromise on what workers experienced as forced mobility that would devastate work-life balance (Health Coalition, undated). In October 2024, a government-appointed mediator produced a proposal that essentially replicated the rejected April offer. Experts noted the government was 'counting on intimidating nurses with the implicit threat that if they persist in their opposition it could try to short-circuit the entire process by adopting an emergency strikebreaking law' (WSWS, October 14, 2024). The collective agreement was eventually signed in December 2024, though disputes over unpaid bonuses continued into 2025 (Montreal CityNews, August 24, 2025).

The FIQ case demonstrates the limits of coordination network reach with precision: without formal Common Front membership and the coordinated escalation calendar it provides, the FIQ's sustained pressure produced slower resolution on comparatively less favorable terms. The government's capacity to maintain hard-line

positions against individual unions – even after conceding to the coordinated coalition – was substantially greater than its capacity to maintain them against the 420,000-worker synchronized mobilization. The mechanism is visible exactly here: the pre-existing infrastructure enabled the wave; absent formal membership in the infrastructure's institutional expression, the FIQ was exposed to the same government strategy the Common Front was designed to defeat.

Bill 89: The State-Construction Argument in Reverse

On February 19, 2025, Labor Minister Jean Boulet introduced Bill 89, formally titled An Act to give greater consideration to the needs of the population in the event of a strike or a lock-out (Lavery, February 20, 2025). Passed on May 29, 2025, and set to take effect November 30, 2025, the legislation fundamentally restricted the right to strike across Quebec's public sector (BLG, September 2025; National Law Review, undated). Key provisions expanded the definition of essential services from health and safety to the vague standard of the 'well-being of the population,' applicable to virtually any sector; granted the Labor Minister power to unilaterally order strikes ended and impose binding arbitration whenever the Minister deems a strike threatens 'serious or irreparable harm to the public' (National Law Review, undated; BLG, September 2025); permitted public sector lockouts for the first time in modern Quebec history (RSS Lex, undated); and imposed fines of $1,000 to $10,000 per day for violations (BLG, September 2025).

The CAQ government framed the legislation as necessary to protect the public from strike disruptions, pointing to Quebec's 91 percent share of Canadian work stoppages between 2023 and 2025 against a historical baseline of 56 percent (IEDM, May

2025). Unions characterized it as ‘a declaration of war,’ ‘an all-out anti-strike law,’ and ‘a gift to management.’ Legal experts warned the legislation likely violates the Charter of Rights and Freedoms’ protection of freedom of association, citing the 2015 Supreme Court ruling recognizing striking as a constitutional right (BLG, September 2025). Unions announced constitutional challenges immediately upon passage (BLG, September 2025).

Chapter 1 draws on Howell’s (2021) argument that the state actively constructs and dismantles the institutional conditions under which coordination infrastructure operates. Bill 89 makes this argument legible in real time. The Common Front coordination infrastructure was built through deliberate political decisions – the 1972 general strike and its aftermath institutionalized the culture; successive legal frameworks embedded it; the April 2022 reconstitution demonstrated that its relational foundations survived even a fragmented inter-round period and a pandemic. Bill 89 is an equally deliberate political decision to dismantle the legal conditions under which that infrastructure can produce binding industrial outcomes. The CAQ government, having faced the largest strike in Quebec history and ultimately conceded 17.4 percent over five years, concluded that the cost of leaving the infrastructure intact exceeded the cost of the constitutional challenge its dismantling would invite. Whether the challenge succeeds will determine the durability of the dismantling; what is already visible is the symmetry Howell identifies – political decisions build coordination infrastructure, and political decisions can unbuild it.

The STM Transit Strike: Bill 89's First Real-World Test

The Montreal transit strike of October–November 2025 provided Bill 89's first operational test and confirmed every concern union actors had articulated during the law's passage. STM maintenance workers (CUPE Local 1983) launched a strike on October 31, 2025, with bus drivers and Metro operators planning additional action from November 15–16, threatening a complete shutdown of the island's public transit network. The government's immediate response was to attempt to fast-track Bill 89 – scheduled for November 30 implementation – into immediate effect, before the scheduled bus and Metro driver action could begin (CBC News, November 5, 2025; CBC News, November 11, 2025).

The political dynamics around the fast-track attempt documented the Howell mechanism with unusual clarity. A coalition of Montreal business associations called on the government to invoke Bill 89 immediately, framing it as a tool for protecting the public – the precise framing the government had used to justify the law's passage (CBC News, November 5, 2025). Labour Minister Jean Boulet announced plans to introduce accelerating legislation, characterizing the situation as "humanly inadmissible" and arguing that "unfortunately there are pressure tactics that have disproportionate impacts on the population" (Boulet, cited in Yahoo News Canada / CBC, November 12, 2025). From inside the legislature, Alexandre Leduc (Québec Solidaire, labour critic) named the mechanism Bill 89's critics had predicted: "We told them [the law] would have a bad effect on negotiation tables. It would push bosses to sit on their hands" – and run the clock until the state resolved the dispute for them (Leduc, cited in CBC News, November

11, 2025). Frédéric Therrien, president of CUPE Local 1983, made the structural argument directly: “The CAQ is handling this issue in the worst possible way. By threatening to fast-track the implementation of this law, Minister Boulet is jeopardizing a swift, negotiated settlement between the parties. His message to the STM is to wait, and that he will resolve the matter for them by imposing a collective agreement” (Therrien, cited in Cult MTL, November 7, 2025). The STM maintenance workers’ union characterized the government’s intervention as proof it “prefers to attack workers’ rights once again rather than adequately fund public transit” (STM maintenance workers’ union, cited in Global News, November 12, 2025).

The STM maintenance workers suspended their strike on November 12, 2025 – hours before Boulet tabled the accelerating legislation – and Law 14 (the enacted name for Bill 89) took effect November 30 as originally scheduled (CBC News, November 13, 2025). The fast-track attempt failed procedurally because the union resolved the immediate crisis before the legislation could be invoked; but the attempt itself revealed the law’s operational logic in exactly the terms its critics predicted. Leduc’s observation that the law incentivizes employers to sit on their hands until arbitration resolves the dispute for them was confirmed in real time: the STM had declined to move on salary demands and subcontracting, reasoning that the approaching November 30 effective date made sustained bargaining unnecessary. The law had chilled negotiations before it was even formally in force. Boulet’s own language – ‘disproportionate impacts,’ ‘humanly inadmissible’ – documents the normative framework through which the state justifies deploying its dismantling power. Whether the constitutional challenges succeed will be

determined by the courts; what the STM episode establishes is that the mechanism Howell identifies is not theoretical. It operates in real time, and its first real-world test produced exactly the dynamics critics predicted.

Summary: What the Quebec Process Trace Establishes

Pre-pandemic network activation: The pre-pandemic coordination record from 2008 through early 2020 documents operationally exercised inter-central networks across at least nine documented episodes: the 2008 bilateral CSN-FTQ truce (La Presse, October 27, 2008), the 2009 seven-organization non-raiding pact and Common Front formation (Le Soleil, May 11, 2009; SCFP, May 11, 2009), the 2010 Common Front round (Radio-Canada, June 2010), the 2012 Alliance Sociale joint legal and declaratory mobilization (CSQ, May 25, 2012), the 2014-2015 Refusons l'austérité coalition (CSN, November 29, 2014; Radio-Canada, November 29, 2014), the 2015 Common Front round (CSQ, December 9, 2015), the joint minimum-wage and pharmacare campaigns (FTQ, September 9, 2018; CSN, September 9, 2018), the April 2019 solidarity protocol as a standalone non-raiding agreement unprecedented in Quebec labor history (Presse-toi à gauche, June 4, 2019; Radio-Canada, April 24, 2019), and the January 2020 joint pay equity Superior Court challenge (FTQ, January 15, 2020; CSN, January 15, 2020; CSQ, January 15, 2020). The 2019-2020 non-Common Front was not a suspension of these networks but a coordinated accommodation of legitimately divergent organizational interests through the same inter-central coordination infrastructure that produced Common Fronts in other rounds (Radio-Canada, October 24, 2019; Presse-toi à gauche, June 4, 2019).

Post-pandemic mobilization: The post-pandemic mobilization of these same organizations is documented across multiple phases: the November 25, 2020 joint visibility action by eight organizations without a formal Common Front (FTQ communiqué, November 25, 2020; L'actualité, November 25, 2020); the May 12, 2021 joint advertising campaign by four organizations (APTS, CSN, CSQ, FTQ joint communiqué, Newswire, May 12, 2021); the 2021 pre-wave disputes at Olymel, APTS, and in the daycare sector establishing acute grievance before formal reconstitution; the April 2022 Common Front formation explicitly dated to the 50th anniversary of 1972 (FTQ communiqué, April 3, 2022; frontcommun.org, 2022); the APTS joining as a direct member for the first time in September 2022 (Newswire, September 28, 2022); the September 23, 2023 march of over 100,000 public-sector workers and supporters through Montreal demonstrating organizational readiness before the formal escalation calendar engaged, with Enault's 'People are angry' and Comeau's 'Our people are ready' documenting the rank-and-file condition at that moment (CTV News / Canadian Press, September 23, 2023; Ricochet Media, March 15, 2024); and the historic November–December 2023 strike wave mobilizing 420,000 workers across 11 strike days (SCFP, December 8, 2023; Renaud, Tempest Magazine, July 2, 2024).

Causal links and continuity: The causal link between pre-pandemic networks and post-pandemic mobilization operates through three documented mechanisms.

- Deliberate historical framing: the 50th-anniversary timing and frontcommun.org's historical narrative explicitly positioned the 2022 reconstitution as institutional inheritance (frontcommun.org, 2022; FTQ, April 3, 2022), and Enault's biographical

connection to 1972 makes that inheritance personal as well as institutional (Enault, cited in Le Devoir, November 2022).

- Negative learning: the fragmented 2020 round's inadequate outcomes were explicitly cited by union actors and analysts as the direct motivator for reconstitution (La Presse, September 28, 2022; Renaud, Tempest Magazine, October 24, 2023), and the 2022–23 demand architecture was directly shaped by the lesson that separate bargaining tables allow government divide-and-conquer strategies that joint tables foreclose.
- Structural path dependence: Collombat's analysis identifies the centralized bargaining system as inherently generating recurrent Common Front formations from the same relational substrate, while simultaneously identifying grassroots inter-union networks like Lutte Commune as sustaining the organizational culture between formal bargaining cycles (Collombat, À bâbord!, Summer 2024). The speed of the April 2022 reconstitution – within a year of the FTQ's 2021 settlement – is itself evidence of maintained infrastructure: complex multi-federation coalition-building of this scale does not occur in months unless relational foundations are already in place.

The contrast with Ontario and British Columbia – provinces where identical rollback conditions produced no cross-sector escalation – is what the following sections develop. The contrast is not between strong and weak labor movements, between favorable and unfavorable party governments, or between different economic conditions. All three provinces shared the same federal economic environment and the same rollback timing. The contrast is between a province whose coordination networks were operationally exercised for cross-sector, extra-contractual mobilization across the decade

before the shock arrived – as the nine pre-pandemic coordination episodes document – and two provinces where comparable organizational capacity was channeled toward institutional arenas that the shock did not overwhelm.

Ontario: Grievance Without Cross-Sector Coordination Infrastructure

Regulatory Containment in Operation: Ontario's process trace establishes what the activation-sequencing framework predicts for a case where IV1=Premature and IV2=Latent: that rollback-generated grievance was real and acute, but that the absence of operationally exercised cross-sector coordination networks produced sectoral rather than wave-level responses. Ontario workers faced the same federal economic conditions as Quebec workers – the same CRB expiry, the same inflation trajectory, the same real wage erosion – and organized labor demonstrated that it was capable of sustained action and, under sufficient provocation, cross-sector solidarity. What it did not produce was the synchronized, sustained, multi-sector escalation that defines a wave. The regulatory containment mechanism was working as its institutional architecture produces: disputes flowed into formal, provincially bounded channels and were resolved within them.

The Ford government's political context going into the pandemic shaped the terrain. Elected in 2018 with a focus on fiscal conservatism and public service restructuring, the government arrived at the pandemic period having already passed Bill 124 – the Protecting a Sustainable Public Sector for Future Generations Act – in 2019, which capped public sector compensation increases at 1 percent annually for three years (CBC News). The Bill 124 constitutional challenges filed by ETFO, OSSTF, CUPE, and other public sector unions consumed significant organizational bandwidth through the

pandemic years: leadership attention, legal resources, communications capacity, and strategic energy that might otherwise have been directed toward cross-sector mobilization were absorbed by litigation that was finally vindicated when the Ontario Superior Court struck down Bill 124 as unconstitutional in 2022 (CBC News). The years of the challenge were precisely the years in which coordination networks would have needed to be exercised if they were to be live when the pandemic arrived.

2021-22: Education Sector Disputes Along Pre-Pandemic Tracks

Ontario's post-pandemic labor landscape in 2021 and 2022 was defined by education sector disputes that proceeded within the regulatory channels the province's institutional architecture provides. The Ford government's approach to public sector labor relations was characterized by public debates about healthcare spending reductions, labor disputes concentrated in the education sector, and general anxiety about the cost and accessibility of public services – tensions that predated the pandemic and continued through it (CBC News; Policy Options IRPP). When COVID-19 emergency legislation expanded the government's powers to respond to evolving public health threats and temporarily changed rules around hospital staffing, the effect was to further contain disputes within administrative rather than industrial channels (Policy Options IRPP).

The Ontario college faculty near-strike of March 2022 is characteristic of this pattern. Sixteen thousand college faculty represented by OPSEU were on the brink of a province-wide strike after many months without a contract, with key issues including faculty control over work assignments, use of partial-load and contract staff, and protections against excessive workloads (CBC News). With a strike deadline looming

and concern about disruption for over 200,000 students, both sides agreed to last-minute binding interest arbitration – the dispute routed into the arm's-length resolution mechanism that the provincial institutional architecture provides rather than allowed to escalate into sustained strike action (CBC News). The pattern recurred: high strike readiness, credible threat, institutional resolution before cross-sector implications could develop.

The sectoral boundedness of these disputes was not incidental. It was the post-pandemic expression of a pre-pandemic coordination infrastructure that had itself been sectorally organized. Ontario's unions had entered the pandemic with their organizational energy directed toward sector-specific battles: Bill 124 litigation within the public sector, education bargaining within the education sector, Unifor's manufacturing defense within the private sector. The post-pandemic disputes reproduced that pre-pandemic sectorally bounded organizational logic: each union fought within its own institutional track, because the pre-pandemic period had not yet yielded cross-sector coordination infrastructure to produce a different response.

November 2022: Reactive Cross-Sector Mobilization and Its Limits

The November 2022 CUPE education workers episode is the most analytically significant event in Ontario's post-pandemic record, and Part 2 has already addressed its implications for IV2 coding. The process trace places it in its correct temporal and causal position: an extraordinary display of cross-sector solidarity assembled reactively under extreme provocation, more than two and a half years after pandemic onset, that confirms coordination capacity without establishing pre-pandemic activation.

The episode's facts are well documented by Tucker (2025). The Ford government pre-emptively passed Bill 28, which imposed a four-year contract on approximately 55,000 CUPE education support workers – including early childhood educators, custodians, and educational assistants – prohibited strike action, and controversially invoked the notwithstanding clause of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms to override constitutional labor protections (Global News; CBC News; Al Jazeera). CUPE demanded an 11.7 percent annual raise; the government's initial offer was 2 percent – a gap that, in an inflationary environment, represented a real wage cut (Global News; CBC News). CUPE and its members staged an illegal walkout in defiance of Bill 28, closing hundreds of schools. Within days, the Canadian Labour Congress, the Ontario Federation of Labour, and unions from across all industries and sectors committed to a general strike if Bill 28 remained in force – a mobilization that Tucker (2025) documents as unmistakable cross-sector coordination capacity. The Ford government, facing province-wide general strike commitments and mounting public backlash, repealed Bill 28 and returned to the bargaining table within a week (Global News; CBC News; Al Jazeera). The resulting agreement delivered a $1/hour wage increase for every worker – approximately 3.59 percent annually – though without the guaranteed staffing improvements workers had sought (Global News; CBC News).

The activation-sequencing framework's interpretation of this episode, established in Part 2, can now be stated in process-trace terms: the November 2022 episode demonstrates that the organizational infrastructure for cross-sector coordination existed in Ontario and could be rapidly assembled under conditions of sufficient provocation. It also

demonstrates that the activation process was underway – that the pandemic period was, as the framework predicts for latent cases, triggering the process by which coordination networks would be operationally exercised. But it was reactive and crisis-triggered, assembled two and a half years after pandemic onset in response to a legislative attack of a kind that Ontario had not previously faced in the post-pandemic period. It did not generate the sustained, synchronized, multi-sector wave that Quebec's pre-activated networks produced in the same period.

The November 2022 episode is analytically significant for a second reason beyond what Part 2 establishes. It represents the first moment in Ontario's post-pandemic record in which the labor movement's coordination broke out of the sectoral confines that had defined both its pre-pandemic organizational logic and its post-pandemic strike activity. The cross-sector general strike commitments assembled in November 2022 were, in a precise sense, a reaction to the sectoral boundedness of post-pandemic conflict: the Ford government's targeting of one sector's workers provoked a labor movement-wide response precisely because the sectoral boundaries of normal bargaining had been violated by legislative fiat. Ontario's post-pandemic construction of labor movement-wide coordination was thus reactive and episodic, not proactive and continuous: built in response to the sectoral confinement of strike activity rather than in anticipation of it.

2023-24: Sectoral Militancy, No Cross-Sector Escalation

Ontario's 2023 and 2024 post-pandemic record shows continued sectoral militancy – strong grievances, high strike mandate votes, credible strike threats – resolved through existing institutional channels without cross-sector escalation. The

pattern is what the framework predicts when IV1=Premature meets IV2=Latent: acute grievance meeting institutional containment.

In July through August 2023, approximately 3,700 Unifor members at 27 Metro grocery stores in the Greater Toronto Area launched a month-long strike seeking fair wages, reinstatement of pandemic-era hero pay, more full-time jobs, and improved benefits. The central grievance was that grocery workers had been left behind during a period of high inflation while large grocers reported record profits (Toronto Star; CBC News; Jacobin, August 2023). Members rejected an initial tentative agreement, prolonging the disruption and maintaining strong public support – the strike resonated with widespread frustration at rising food costs. The final collective agreement was described as historic, including substantial front-loaded wage increases and enhanced benefits setting a new compensation bar for the sector (Toronto Star; CBC News). The Ontario government did not intervene legislatively, urging resolution at the bargaining table. The dispute remained entirely within a single employer relationship – Unifor versus Metro – at no point developing cross-sector implications.

On November 7, 2022, approximately 2,200 Amalgamated Transit Union local 1587 members – bus operators and staff for GO Transit serving the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area – walked off the job, suspending most bus service for thousands of commuters (Global News; CBC News). Workers sought secure full-time employment, cost-of-living wage increases, and health and safety enhancements after months of unsuccessful negotiations, strike votes, and the expiration of a no-strike period (Global News; CBC News). The Ford government did not attempt legislative intervention. The

strike ended after four days when both sides agreed to a mediated settlement including wage gains, improved job security, and new protective language for workers (Global News; CBC News). One sector, one employer, four days, institutional resolution.

The pattern across Ontario's post-pandemic record is consistent and precisely what the regulatory containment mechanism produces: each dispute runs its course within its own institutional track. Ontario labor law's provincial, Wagner Act model – confining protected action to single-employer bargaining unit disputes without a common front mechanism – ensures that cross-sector escalation has no legal channel through which to operate even where the organizational solidarity of November 2022 demonstrated it could be assembled. The capacity for coordination remained; what was absent was the pre-pandemic operational exercise of that capacity for cross-sector mobilization that would have made it live when the shock arrived.

Thus, the post-pandemic period produced two parallel paths in Ontario: sectorally bound mobilization, alongside a cross-sector activation process that the pre-pandemic period had not produced.

Post-Pandemic Activation: The Initiation of Cross-Sector Network Building

The November 2022 CUPE episode did not only demonstrate that Ontario's labor movement could assemble cross-sector solidarity under extreme provocation – it initiated a post-pandemic organizational trajectory away from the province's pre-pandemic baseline. The evidence from 2023 and 2024 documents a labor movement beginning to build cross-sector coordination infrastructure that its pre-pandemic baseline had not produced.

The OFL's first institutional response was the Enough is Enough campaign, launched January 31, 2023 under President Patty Coates. The campaign drew CUPE, OPSEU, Unifor, ETFO, ONA, UFCW, and USW alongside community coalitions including Justice for Workers, Migrant Workers Alliance, and the Ontario Health Coalition in joint mobilization around five demands: real wages, public schools and healthcare, affordable basics, rent control, and corporate taxation (OFL, GlobeNewswire, January 31, 2023). Its June 3, 2023 province-wide Day of Action drew 20,000–30,000 workers across 25 cities (OFL, GlobeNewswire, May 31, 2023). No comparable cross-sector joint campaign appears in Ontario's pre-pandemic record.

The campaign's organizational limits were acknowledged internally. People's Voice (December 4, 2023) characterized the consensus at the OFL's November 2023 17th Biennial Convention: Enough is Enough had "suffered from a lack of mobilization and action... the OFL and the affiliates didn't back up the campaign's strong demands with the necessary organizing infrastructure, resourcing and engagement at the community level." The convention's Action Plan aspired to "prepare for another 'Bill 28 moment'" but did not establish the standing committee, rapid-response protocol, or cross-sector bargaining council required for preparation (OFL, convention-2023recap).

The most structurally significant post-2022 organizational output was the October 5, 2023 Together for Respect solidarity pact, in which SEIU Healthcare, OCHU-CUPE, and Unifor signed a 10-point agreement covering 70,000 hospital workers – a formalized inter-union coordination commitment across distinct organizational domains within the healthcare sector (Newswire.ca, October 5, 2023). The November 2023 OFL convention

elected Laura Walton – CUPE/OSBCU president and the public face of the November 2022 defiance – as OFL president on a platform of worker power, political education, and organizing to win (GlobeNewswire, November 21, 2023).

British Columbia: Grievance Channeled Through Institutional Accommodation

BC's Accommodation Mechanism in Action: British Columbia's process trace establishes the accommodative channel redirection mechanism that Part 2 identified. The BC NDP government elected in 2017 – and re-elected in majority in 2020 – introduced labor-friendly reforms including labor legislation strengthening collective bargaining rights and reversing elements of the aggressive anti-union policies of the Campbell era (Orhierhor et al., 2023). This political context channeled organizational energy toward institutional dialogue rather than extra-institutional cross-sector mobilization. The NDP's responsiveness to labor made the strategic pressure to develop the kind of extra-contractual, extra-institutional coordination that Lutte Commune exemplified in Quebec essentially absent: institutional channels were available and productive.

The result is visible in BC's post-pandemic dispute record: high strike readiness, high mandate votes, credible strike threats – and consistent resolution through mediation before any dispute could develop cross-sector implications. Labour Minister Harry Bains characterized the government's approach as "a facilitative rather than coercive approach," in contrast to the federal government's practice of invoking binding arbitration and back-to-work legislation (CityNews, May 21, 2022; Policy Alternatives, 2004; CBC News). The mediation infrastructure that the NDP built and maintained – centering on experienced facilitators including Vince Ready and Amanda Rogers –

became the default resolution mechanism for provincial-level disputes across sectors (CityNews, May 21, 2022; CityNews, June 14, 2022; CBC News; BargainingBC).

2022: The Mediation Pattern Established

The BC Transit Sea to Sky strike of January through June 2022 established the post-pandemic pattern in its clearest form. Approximately 80 Unifor members employed by PW Transit in Squamish, Whistler, and Pemberton struck over wage parity with Metro Vancouver transit operators and protection against the corridor's high cost of living, making it the longest transit strike in provincial history at the time (CityNews, May 21, 2022; CityNews, June 14, 2022). The provincial government played a limited role, primarily encouraging the parties to return to mediation; Labour Minister Bains declined to legislate a return to work despite calls from the opposition (CityNews, May 21, 2022). Special mediator Vince Ready resolved the dispute with a five-year agreement including a 13.5 percent wage increase and a cost-of-living adjustment clause (CityNews, June 14, 2022).

The Rempel Bros. Concrete strike of May through June 2022 extended the pattern into the private sector. Approximately 160 workers with IUOE Local 115 and Teamsters Local 213 struck Rempel Bros. Concrete over 14-hour workdays with few breaks and demands for fair scheduling, affecting regional concrete supplies and major infrastructure projects (CBC News; Teamsters 213). The government did not legislate a solution; contractor associations urged expedited mediation; mediator Jacquie De Aguayo conducted the process; and the strike concluded with wage increases of 14 to 16 percent

and improved scheduling language (Teamsters 213). Different sector, different union, same resolution pathway.

Post-pandemic labor organizing in British Columbia has been defined province-wide by this pattern: renewed union confidence, near-universal use of strong strike mandates – often upwards of 90 percent – and strategic reliance on high-profile mediation rather than direct state intervention (BargainingBC; Global News). Unions adopted a model of mobilizing members early and securing overwhelming mandates before entering final bargaining rounds, using the mandate as leverage to compel employers to take negotiations seriously and often driving significant wage settlements without the mandate being exercised (BCGEU CBA updates). Credible strike threats accelerated terms at the table even when stoppages did not materialize (BCGEU CBA updates). The mediation culture was not merely a government preference – it was viewed favorably by both labor and many employers as an alternative to the legislative confrontations of previous decades (CityNews, May 21, 2022; CBC News).

2025: The Accommodation Mechanism at the Outer Limit

The LifeLabs strike of February through May 2025 and the BCGEU public service strike of September through October 2025 extended the accommodation pattern into a period of more acute confrontation, and together demonstrate that the mechanism held even at its outer limit.

Approximately 1,200 LifeLabs employees represented by BCGEU conducted rotating strikes to press for wage increases and relief from chronic understaffing, following the expiry of their contract in April 2024 (CBC News; BCGEU LifeLabs

updates). The government did not intervene directly, allowing mediator Mark Brown's recommendations to resolve the dispute. The outcome was wage increases between 11.3 and 20 percent over three years and critical working condition improvements (BCGEU LifeLabs updates). Government restraint – institutional facilitation over coercive intervention – was again the mechanism.

The BCGEU public service strike of September through October 2025 is the analytically most significant BC dispute in the post-pandemic period, because it placed the NDP government in the position of direct employer rather than neutral facilitator. Over 25,000 BCGEU members working in the BC public service initiated an eight-week strike that shut down liquor and cannabis distribution and affected ministry services across the province (BargainingBC; CBC, Oct. 2025; Global News). Major grievances involved wage erosion due to inflation, demands for retroactivity, equity adjustments, and expanded telework rights. Even in this position – as the employer of workers in a protracted and disruptive dispute – the provincial government avoided legislating a return to work and chose instead to enter non-binding mediation with facilitators Vince Ready and Amanda Rogers (BargainingBC; CBC, Oct. 2025; BC Gov News). The outcome was a four-year collective agreement with 3 percent annual wage increases, enhanced job protections, and specific improvements for the lowest paid (CBC, Oct. 2025; BC Gov News). This was, as the existing record notes, a clear break from previous provincial eras where back-to-work legislation and wage rollbacks were more common responses to comparable disputes (BargainingBC; CBC, Oct. 2025).

The contrast with the federal government's handling of comparable disputes in the same period is the most direct way to see the accommodation mechanism's significance. While BC under the NDP was facilitating mediation in provincial disputes, the federal government under Labor Minister Steven MacKinnon was invoking Section 107 of the Canada Labor Code within hours or days of work stoppages in federally regulated sectors. The BC pattern is not the absence of a mechanism – it is the presence of a different mechanism, one that channels labor-capital conflict toward resolution rather than escalation and that, by doing so, systematically prevents the kind of sustained, unresolved confrontation from which cross-sector solidarity draws its force.

BC in Summary

BC's post-pandemic record confirms the framework's prediction for a case where IV1=Premature meets IV2=Latent through accommodative channel redirection: real grievances, high organizational readiness, but no cross-sector escalation. The NDP government's facilitative approach – and, critically, its effectiveness – meant that each dispute found an institutional resolution before it could develop the kind of unresolved political crisis that the November 2022 CUPE episode in Ontario required to trigger cross-sector solidarity. The circuits for cross-sector coordination were not live because the strategic conditions that would have exercised them – an unresponsive institutional environment pushing unions outward toward extra-institutional solidarity – were absent. The accommodation mechanism produced latency not through hostility or organizational weakness but through the availability and productivity of responsive institutional channels.

Federal Jurisdiction: An Additional Containment Layer

The federal government's post-pandemic labor relations record in federally regulated industries – transportation, postal services, aviation – constitutes a third containment layer operating above the provincial level and adding analytical texture to the non-wave outcome in Ontario and BC. Disputes in federally regulated sectors cross provincial boundaries and, in principle, could serve as connective tissue linking provincial labor movements into something approaching cross-jurisdictional coordination. In practice, the federal government's rapid and consistent invocation of Section 107 of the Canada Labor Code – compelling binding arbitration and ordering workers back – channeled each such dispute into bilateral resolution before it could develop inter-provincial solidarity implications. The pattern also documents, in real time, the mechanism that Chapter 1 identifies as containing disputes within sectoral tracks: federal intervention in essential industries operates as a predictable ceiling on the duration and escalation of any dispute, making strategic cross-sector solidarity calculations by unions in these sectors functionally constrained.

Port of Montreal 2021 and PSAC 2023: Pattern Established Before 2024 Cases

The federal containment pattern visible in the 2024 rail and port cases was not new. In April 2021 – while Quebec's public-sector bargaining remained stalled and the APTS was preparing its June strike days – the Trudeau Liberal government tabled back-to-work legislation to end a strike by approximately 1,200 CUPE Local 375 longshore workers at the Port of Montreal (Montreal Gazette, April 26, 2021; CBC, April 30, 2021). The legislation passed the Senate and received royal assent, ending a strike that had

begun April 26. The intervention came within days of the stoppage, establishing the federal government's willingness to legislate in federally regulated sectors at the onset of economic disruption – and doing so years before the escalating 2024 interventions that Section 3.4 documents.

The April–May 2023 federal public service strike extended the pattern to a different context: the federal government as direct employer rather than legislative intervener. Approximately 120,000 PSAC members – primarily Treasury Board employees working across federal ministries – launched the largest federal public service strike in Canadian history on April 19, 2023, demanding wage increases to match inflation and seeking to protect remote work provisions that had restructured their lives during the pandemic (CBC News, April 18, 2023; HR Reporter, April 30, 2023). The strike simultaneously shut down border crossings, federal offices, and tax processing operations. Barry Eidlin, analyzing the dispute's significance in real time, observed that the strike 'revealed the depth of anger and alienation among federal workers that had been building for years' and constituted 'one of the largest strikes in Canadian history' by any measure (Eidlin, barryeidlin.org, May 2, 2023). A tentative deal was reached within approximately two weeks (HR Reporter, April 30, 2023). Unlike the 2024 rail and port interventions, the PSAC dispute resolved through direct negotiation without Section 107 binding arbitration – the federal government, as the employer at the bargaining table, could settle directly. That distinction matters for the framework: Section 107 is reserved for third-party disputes in federally regulated industries, not disputes where the federal government is itself the employer. The PSAC episode shows federal workers can win

through sustained industrial action when the federal government faces political costs from legislating against its own employees. It also generated legal aftermath: PSAC members who participated in the strike faced charges; PSAC secured their clearance by December 2024 (PSAC, December 19, 2024).

BC Port Strike 2023: Restraint Before Acceleration

The July–August 2023 BC port dispute – ILWU local members versus BC Maritime Employers Association over wages and automation – resolved without Section 107 intervention, establishing the contrast that makes the 2024 interventions analytically significant. The strike began July 1; a tentative four-year deal was reached July 13 (Reuters, July 13, 2023). The federal government declined to invoke binding arbitration during the thirteen-day stoppage despite calls from manufacturing associations and some premiers to end the dispute legislatively (CBC News, July 11, 2023). Workers subsequently rejected the tentative deal, prompting further negotiations that produced ratification in August (CBC News, August 4, 2023). Throughout the dispute, the federal government observed from a distance – pressing for negotiated resolution but not deploying Section 107. The 2024 ILWU Local 514 dispute at the same ports drew a Section 107 intervention within eight days. The contrast between 2023 restraint and 2024 acceleration documents what Section 3.4's conclusion identifies as the post-pandemic calibration of intervention thresholds: the federal government was progressively more willing to invoke its statutory ceiling as the economic stakes became more visible and the political costs of non-intervention rose.

The 2024 Canadian rail dispute is the clearest single illustration of federal containment at work. Over 9,300 workers represented by the Teamsters Canada Rail Conference (TCRC) – engineers, conductors, yard workers, and dispatchers at Canadian National Railway (CN) and Canadian Pacific Kansas City (CPKC) – voted 98 percent in favor of strike action in May 2024 after months of contentious bargaining including unlawful employer changes to work rules and attempts to bypass union negotiators (Reuters, May 1, 2024). Workers demanded that safety-critical fatigue provisions remain in their contracts and rejected proposals they described as leading to "tearing families apart" through forced temporary relocations (Jacobin, September 20, 2024; BBC, August 22, 2024). When both rail companies issued lockout notices in August 2024, TCRC emphasized that the Teamsters remained at the bargaining table even as work stoppages loomed (TTNews, August 21, 2024).

Within 17 hours of the lockout beginning, Labor Minister Steven MacKinnon invoked Section 107 of the Canada Labor Code, compelling binding arbitration, ordering workers back, and extending current contracts until new ones could be arbitrated – one of the fastest interventions in Canadian labor history (CBC News, August 24, 2024; CNN, August 22, 2024). MacKinnon stated: "It is the government's obligation to maintain industrial harmony in this essential sector" (BBC, August 22, 2024). Prime Minister Trudeau, acknowledging reluctance, said: "I saw no other option because of the railroads' economic importance" (PBS NewsHour, August 30, 2024). The Canada Industrial Relations Board's ruling, challenged but upheld by the courts, left workers with no further right to strike during the binding arbitration period (Reuters, August 23, 2024).

Arbitration imposed contracts with 3 percent annual wage increases – workers decried the figure as insufficient – with no resolution on the core fatigue and forced relocation concerns, and without a worker ratification vote (Reuters, August 23, 2024; Jacobin, September 20, 2024). TCRC legal appeals alleging Charter rights violations proceeded through the courts as rail companies reported investor confidence boosts following the arbitration outcome (Reuters, August 23, 2024; CBC News, August 30, 2024).

Port Disputes 2024 and Canada Post 2024-25: Containment at Different Speeds

The 2024 port disputes demonstrated the same federal containment mechanism applied simultaneously on two coasts. On the West Coast, ILWU Local 514 – representing over 700 ship and dock foremen – confronted the BC Maritime Employers Association over Dubai Ports World's attempt to unilaterally automate a Vancouver rail yard and rewrite manning agreements, along with demands for wage increases matching the 19.2 percent over four years won by rank-and-file members in 2023 (Reuters, Oct. 4, 2024; GHY International, Nov. 11, 2024). ILWU Local 514 president Frank Morena stated: "Our members have repeatedly tried since our contract expired on March 31, 2023, to bargain...but the BCMEA employers have refused to move and now want to create a crisis instead of negotiating" (CityNews Vancouver, Nov. 12, 2024). At the Port of Montreal, over 1,200 CUPE Local 375 longshore workers struck over scheduling practices their president Michel Murray described as "archaic" – forced overtime, unpredictable shifts, and family disruption – voting 99.7 percent to reject the employer's "final offer" (CUPE, Oct. 6, 2024; Baking Association of Canada, Oct. 9, 2024; MEA, Nov.–Dec. 2024).

MacKinnon intervened after eight days on the West Coast and just two days in Montreal, invoking Section 107 and ordering all parties back to work under binding arbitration (Reuters, Nov. 12, 2024; Al Jazeera, Nov. 12, 2024). He justified the action: "As the economic damages pose a threat to the nation and continue to escalate, it falls upon the government to ensure that we can proceed with the economic activities of this country and avert layoffs and other devastation" (Al Jazeera, Nov. 12, 2024). He also warned: "Canadians currently have a low tolerance for economic self-inflicted harm" (Reuters, Nov. 12, 2024). Both unions pledged to challenge the intervention in court, with ILWU Local 514 and CUPE's leadership denouncing what they described as a political shortcut for employers (CityNews Vancouver, Nov. 12, 2024; CUPE, Nov. 11, 2024). Business groups celebrated the federal move; the NDP criticized its frequency and speed but did not block it (The Maple, Nov. 17, 2024). The BC parties reached a new contract after binding arbitration with terms undisclosed; in Montreal, a 90-day mediation period began with binding arbitration set if no deal was reached (CBC News, June 4, 2025; MEA, Nov.–Dec. 2024; Labor Notes, Dec. 18, 2024). At both ports, the core workplace grievances – automation and scheduling – were deferred rather than resolved, and labor advocates warned that repeated federal intervention risked making meaningful bargaining "an empty formality" (The Maple, Nov. 17, 2024; The Conversation, September 4, 2025).

The Canada Post dispute of 2024-25 is the federal record's most extended case and its most analytically revealing. Approximately 55,000 Canada Post workers represented by the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) struck beginning November 15, 2024 – the onset of peak holiday shipping – with demands including a 24

percent wage increase over four years to match inflation, major improvements in job security against the seven-day part-time parcel delivery model, and enhanced protections against the "gigification" of postal work (BBC, Nov. 19, 2024; Globe and Mail, Oct. 23, 2025; Halifax CityNews, Dec. 5, 2024). Union leaders described the proposed staffing model as "an attempt to create a two-tier workforce" that would undermine job quality for future hires (CUPW, June 10, 2025; Benefits and Pensions Monitor, Nov. 20, 2024). Over 95 percent of members voted in favor of strike action; at the height of the dispute, an estimated 25 million parcels were stranded in the system (CFIB, Dec. 13, 2024). In September 2025, a renewed round of strikes began after the government announced plans to end door-to-door delivery for most Canadians (Yahoo Finance Canada, September 26, 2025).

The government allowed the strike to persist for 32 days before MacKinnon referred the dispute to the CIRB, invoking Section 107 – longer than the rail or port interventions, reflecting both the absence of immediate supply chain crisis and the political difficulty of being seen to suppress postal workers during the holiday season (Global News, Dec. 16, 2024; CBC News, Oct. 23, 2025). The intervention suspended the strike and established an Industrial Inquiry Commission to review Canada Post's finances rather than immediately imposing arbitration (Government of Canada, May 15, 2025). The Commission's report was stark: "Canada Post is facing an existential crisis: It is effectively insolvent, or bankrupt" (Government of Canada, May 15, 2025). By October 2025, no permanent agreement had been reached; rotating strikes persisted; the government ordered a forced vote on Canada Post's final offers in June 2025 without a

ratification agreement resulting (Globe and Mail, Oct. 23, 2025; CBC News, Oct. 23, 2025; The Maple, Oct. 26, 2025). Legal challenges to the intervention were rejected though a notable dissent warned the precedent threatened to suspend collective bargaining rights categorically in essential industries (Globe and Mail, Oct. 23, 2025). Seventy-three percent of small businesses reported they would use Canada Post less in the future as a consequence of the disruption (CFIB, Dec. 13, 2024).

The Federal Pattern: Containment at the Second Level

The pattern across Port of Montreal 2021, PSAC 2023, BC Port Strike 2023, Rail 2024, Port Disputes 2024, and Canada Post 2024-25 is consistent: federal labor law, through Section 107 of the Canada Labor Code and the CIRB's binding arbitration powers, functions as a ceiling on the duration and escalation of disputes in federally regulated sectors. The 2021 Port of Montreal intervention established the template; the 2023 BC port dispute showed the government exercising restraint before conditions escalated; the 2024 cases show the threshold progressively lowering as economic disruption risks became more politically salient – 17 hours for rail in 2024 versus 32 days for Canada Post, reflecting the government's calibration of economic disruption risk. The unions' legal challenges have not dislodged the mechanism. Teamsters, ILWU, CUPE, and CUPW all launched Charter-based challenges arguing that Section 107 powers were being abused; courts upheld the interventions in each case (PBS NewsHour, August 30, 2024; CityNews Vancouver, November 12, 2024; Globe and Mail, October 23, 2025).

For the activation-sequencing framework, this pattern establishes a second-order containment mechanism operating above the provincial level. The federal government's

rapid and predictable intervention in economically significant sectors means that federally regulated disputes – which cross provincial boundaries and could in principle serve as connective tissue linking Ontario and BC labor movements with Quebec's – are resolved bilaterally before inter-provincial solidarity can develop. A rail dispute or a port dispute that escalated without intervention and drew in sympathy actions from provincial-jurisdiction unions could, theoretically, produce the kind of cross-sector solidarity that the activated common front culture enabled in Quebec. Federal intervention forecloses this possibility at the source: each dispute is contained within its bilateral, employer-specific track and resolved through arbitration before it can become the kind of unresolved political crisis that catalyzes cross-sector mobilization.

The NAV Canada air traffic control workers' situation illustrates the chilling effect this creates. Canadian Air Navigation Specialists Association members represented by Unifor Local 1016 voted 95 percent in favor of strike action in April 2024 but did not strike (My Cowichan Valley Now, Apr. 12, 2024; Unifor, Oct. 1, 2024). The union defended bargaining and strike rights through the fall while federal mediators remained centrally involved (Unifor, Oct. 1, 2024). The near-universal mandate and sustained non-strike suggests workers calculated that striking would trigger immediate federal intervention rather than produce the bargaining leverage a strike is designed to generate – the right to strike exists in law but is functionally constrained in practice for workers in sectors the federal government has designated as critical to economic continuity.

IV. Synthesis.

Hypothesis Evaluation: This section evaluates the three competing hypotheses against those entries and develops the theoretical implications specific to the within-Canada configuration.

H1 – The Rollback Hypothesis: H1 predicts that economically premature rollback of pandemic-era income supports produces the wave outcome. All three Canadian provinces received IV1=Premature codings, and only one produced a wave. H1 is therefore neither confirmed nor contradicted by the Canadian evidence in isolation: the identical rollback produced divergent outcomes. This is precisely the pattern H1 predicts as a necessary-but-insufficient condition. What the within-Canada evidence adds to H1's assessment is the most controlled demonstration of its insufficiency available in the study. Where Chapters 3 and 4 established H1's insufficiency by varying both IV1 and IV2 across cross-national cases, the Canadian evidence holds IV1 fixed at exactly identical levels across three sub-national units and observes the outcome: identical rollback, divergent results.

H3 – The Mobilization Capacity Hypothesis: H3 predicts that structurally stronger labor movements produce larger strike waves. The within-Canada evidence falsifies H3 at the sub-national level with cleaner controls than any cross-national comparison in the study can provide. Quebec's union density (approximately 40 percent) exceeds Ontario's (approximately 28 percent) and BC's (approximately 31 percent), but this difference does not track the DV variation in any useful way – Ontario's density is higher than most international comparators, yet Ontario produced no wave. More importantly, all three

provinces share the same LME institutional heritage, the same federal constitutional framework governing collective bargaining, and the same macroeconomic conditions throughout the observation period. If structural capacity predicted wave outcomes within this controlled context, the three provinces should have produced broadly comparable results. They did not. H3 is falsified at the sub-national level with the most similar structural baselines the study provides.

H2, The Activation Sequencing Hypothesis: H2 predicts that premature rollback conjoined with pre-pandemic activation of coordination networks produces the wave outcome. The within-Canada evidence confirms H2 under the most controlled conditions available in the dissertation. IV1 is held perfectly constant – same program, same date, same amount – and only IV2 varies. Quebec, with IV2=Activated, produced a wave. Ontario and BC, both with IV2=Latent, did not. The predicted difference in DV outcome follows precisely the variation in IV2, and only the variation in IV2. No other variable varies across these three cases in the relevant way.

What the Canadian Configuration Contributes

Controlled test of IV2 causal necessity. The cross-national comparisons in Chapters 3 and 4 hold IV1 (macroeconomically premature rollback of pandemic-induced aid) roughly constant across cases coded premature.

However, the premature rollback in the United States operated through a different mechanism, on a different timeline, and at a different scale than in the United Kingdom. The within-Canada comparison, in contrast, holds IV1 constant: the CRB expired on October 23, 2021 for Quebec, Ontario, and British Columbia simultaneously, in the same

amount, against the same inflation environment, under the same federal government. Given that conservative estimates credit the federal government with providing 85% of all pandemic aid, and given that the federal government provided over a quarter of funding for pandemic relief that was provided at the provincial level (Government of Canada, 2020; Financial Accountability Office of Ontario, 2021), this situation approaches the upper limit for a controlled experiment on this one variable.

Two distinct non-wave pathways from identical triggering conditions. Ontario's non-wave outcome reflects regulatory containment and bandwidth absorption: the provincial Wagner Act model confined action to single-employer bargaining tracks, and Bill 124 constitutional litigation consumed the organizational bandwidth that cross-sector mobilization would have required in the pre-pandemic years. BC's non-wave outcome reflects accommodative channel redirection: the NDP government's labor-friendly approach channeled organizational energy toward institutional dialogue and mediation, making the strategic pressure to develop extra-institutional cross-sector networks essentially absent. Both provinces arrived at IV2=Latent by different mechanisms. This parallels Chapter 4's finding that Australia, New Zealand, and Ireland each produced non-wave outcomes through distinct mechanisms despite sharing the relevant condition. The implication for the framework's scope is that the non-wave outcome is mechanistically plural even when the outcome itself is identical: knowing that IV2=Latent does not determine how latency is produced or reversed.

Activation banking in the Quebec case. Chapter 4 introduced the concept of activation banking – the preservation of wave-producing capacity in institutional

channels, awaiting the trigger that will convert it to industrial expression. The April 2019 solidarity protocol that Quebec's five major public-sector organizations signed is the most precisely documented instance of activation banking in the dissertation. Five organizations signed a standalone non-raiding pact for the first time in Quebec labor history – not embedded in a Common Front, not tied to a formal bargaining coalition, but a pure relational maintenance instrument that preserved the inter-organizational relationships and non-aggression norms necessary for future Common Front reconstitution while the organizations pursued legitimately divergent bargaining strategies at separate tables. The January 2020 pay equity court challenge, the November 2020 joint visibility action at the Jacques-Cartier Bridge, and the May 2021 joint advertising campaign are all further banking expressions: coordination infrastructure that continued producing outputs in legal and political domains between formal bargaining rounds, maintaining the operational state of networks that the 2022 reconstitution would draw on within months. The Quebec evidence makes the banking metaphor concrete: coordination capital was deposited continuously and was available for immediate withdrawal when the triggering condition arrived.

Federal containment layer. This chapter also documents a containment mechanism that no other chapter in the dissertation addresses: the federal government's systematic invocation of Section 107 of the Canada Labor Code in federally regulated industries, compelling binding arbitration and ordering workers back within hours or days of work stoppages in economically significant sectors. This second-order mechanism operates above the provincial level and forecloses the kind of inter-provincial escalation

that federally regulated disputes – rail, ports, postal service – could theoretically produce. A rail dispute or port stoppage that escalated without intervention and drew sympathy actions from provincial-jurisdiction unions could, in principle, link Ontario and BC labor movements to Quebec's activated networks. Federal intervention forecloses this possibility at the source, constituting a containment layer that has no equivalent in any cross-national case in the study. The activation-sequencing framework's scope extends to supra-provincial containment mechanisms in federalized labor relations systems, and the Canadian evidence is where that extension becomes visible.

The Canadian Chapter in the Dissertation's Cross-Case Architecture

This chapter's three provincial-level cases interact with the entries from Chapters 3 and 4 to complete the demonstration of H2's conjunctural logic. Chapter 3 established the positive case: two countries with IV1=Premature and IV2=Activated both produced waves, through different organizational pathways. Chapter 4 established the negative cases: Australia and New Zealand (IV2=Activated, IV1=Not Premature) produced no wave, and Ireland (IV1=Premature, IV2=Latent) produced no wave, demonstrating that neither condition alone is sufficient. The Canadian chapter adds the most controlled version of the negative case: Ontario and BC, with IV1=Premature and IV2=Latent, produced no wave – and did so under conditions more similar to each other and to Quebec than any cross-national comparison can approach. Together, these eight analytical units cover the full range of possible truth table configurations. The within-Canada comparison is where the dissertation's conjunctural logic receives its most rigorous test, and it is confirmed at every point.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

In the years following the COVID-19 pandemic, several liberal market economies experienced their largest strike waves in a generation. Workers in healthcare, education, transport, and manufacturing walked out in numbers not seen since the 1980s in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada – countries whose institutional frameworks had, for decades, been understood to suppress exactly this kind of synchronized collective action. Workers in Australia, Ireland, and New Zealand did not produce equivalent waves, despite sharing the same institutional heritage, facing the same exogenous shock in the same historical window, and experiencing comparable macroeconomic disruption in its wake.

The puzzle this dissertation set out to explain is the distribution of those outcomes across comparable cases: why did a shared shock produce post-pandemic strike waves in some liberal market economies, but not in others? And why, within Canada – where federal pandemic supports expired on the same date for all provinces, and the same inflation trajectory bore down on workers across the country – did Quebec experience its largest strike wave on record, while other provinces experienced no wave at all?

Standard predictors do not resolve either puzzle. Union density does not track the outcome: Ireland's density of approximately 22 percent is more than double the US rate of 10 percent, yet Ireland experienced a post-pandemic strike downturn while the US produced its highest total strike time in a generation. Likewise, economic conditions do not align with changes in strike activity: Australia and New Zealand faced inflation rates and labor market disruption broadly comparable to the UK and Canada, yet produced no

waves. Party government and welfare regime are similarly not predictive: Canada and Australia are both resource-influenced LMEs with comparably generous welfare states and center-left governments for portions of the period; their strike outcomes diverged sharply.

The within-Canada comparison sharpens the problem further. Ontario has union density comparable to Quebec's, was governed through the pandemic period by a government demonstrably hostile to organized labor, and was home in November 2022 to one of the most dramatic displays of reactive cross-sector solidarity in Canadian post-pandemic history – yet produced no wave. British Columbia was governed throughout the pre-pandemic and pandemic period by the NDP, the most formally labor-aligned provincial government of the three; it also produced no wave.

I. Summary of the Argument and Evidence.

Case Overview

An activation-sequencing framework argues that post-pandemic strike waves arose where two conditions intersected: economically premature rollback of pandemic-era income supports, which raised the material stakes for workers before labor markets had stabilized, and labor movement coordination networks that were already operationally exercised for cross-sector mobilization before the pandemic arrived. Neither condition alone is sufficient. The first generates grievance without the organizational capacity to convert it into synchronized collective action at scale. The second generates organizational readiness without the triggering condition that makes

deployment urgent. The conjunction of both conditions produces a proximate post-pandemic wave; the absence of either is sufficient to prevent one.

The evidence across eight analytical units – six countries, disaggregated by treating Quebec, Ontario, and British Columbia as separate cases within the Canadian federal system – is consistent with this claim without exception.

Wave Cases

The United States, the United Kingdom, and Quebec share the conjunction of both conditions but arrived at it through institutionally distinct activation pathways. In the United States, the Global Financial Crisis functioned as a critical juncture through a specific forcing mechanism: nationally coordinated employer opposition at Amazon, Walmart, McDonald's, and Starbucks drove workers and organizers to build reactive counter-coordination at comparable national scale. The Fight for $15 campaign, launched in November 2012 and sustained through the eve of the pandemic, built cross-sector coordination infrastructure through repeated joint action spanning fast food, home care, airport, and retail workers across 190 cities; Labor Notes conferences growing to 3,000 attendees by 2018 served as recurring convergence points connecting public- and private-sector activists across organizational boundaries; UAWD, TDU's UPS Teamsters United network, and UCORE's decade of twice-monthly coordination calls constitute the specific organizational nodes through which pre-pandemic activation was maintained and through which the post-pandemic wave was designed and executed – with a single figure, Chris Brooks, moving from Labor Notes staff to UAW Chief of Staff and architecting the Stand-Up Strike. In the United Kingdom, the same critical juncture activated

coordination through a different forcing mechanism: the Cameron-Osborne austerity programme's simultaneous assault on public-sector pay across health, education, civil service, and local government compelled the TUC to operationalize its peak-body coordination function at scale for the first time in a generation. The N30 public sector pensions strike of November 30, 2011 – bringing approximately two million workers out across thirty unions in a single day – is the activation marker; the People's Assembly Against Austerity maintained the standing cross-sector coalition infrastructure from 2013 through pandemic onset; named personnel carried specific organizational experience from the austerity decade directly into wave-period leadership without interruption. In Quebec, no critical juncture was required because no deactivation had occurred: the Common Front bargaining structure, institutionalized since the 1970s and never suspended, maintained continuously active coordination networks through successive public-sector bargaining rounds across the entire period. The September 2019 Lutte Commune climate march – 500,000 participants, coordinated across federation lines in explicit defiance of the Code du travail's political strike prohibition – documents that all three activation conditions were simultaneously satisfied before March 2020. The April 2022 Common Front reconstitution, achieved within a year of the FTQ's 2021 settlement, was not a reconstruction from scratch but a redeployment of infrastructure that the solidarity protocol of April 2019, the joint legal action of January 2020, and the joint visibility action of November 2020 had demonstrably kept in operational exercise through the pandemic period itself.

Non-Wave Rollback Cases

Ontario, British Columbia, and Ireland experienced premature rollback but produced no waves, with latency attributable to distinct mechanisms in each case.

Ontario's coordination networks were institutionally present but had not been operationally exercised for cross-sector mobilization before the pandemic: pre-pandemic coordination was confined to the education sector – sharing a single employer type, a single workplace category, and a single bargaining framework – and the Ford government's Bill 124 litigation absorbed the organizational bandwidth that might otherwise have been directed toward cross-sector activation. The sectorally bounded character of Ontario's pre-pandemic coordination directly produced the sectorally bounded character of its post-pandemic strike activity: each dispute ran within the institutional track defined by the sector whose pre-pandemic organizational energy had been most concentrated.

The November 2022 CUPE episode demonstrates the extent of this sectoral inertia. To break out of the sectoral boundedness that defined Ontario's normal mobilization pattern, the one moment of cross-sector solidarity required an extraordinary political provocation: the Ford government's invocation of the notwithstanding clause to strip a single sector's bargaining rights. That it took a constitutional crisis to assemble cross-sector coordination, and that the coordination dissolved when the provocation was removed, is itself evidence of how thoroughly the sectorally bounded organizational logic governs Ontario's post-pandemic industrial relations.

Here, the contrast with Quebec is instructive: in Quebec, cross-sector labor movement coordination activates on schedule as an institutionalized default, requiring no provocation beyond the normal expiry of a collective agreement. In Ontario, the same outcome required the most extreme political provocation available in the Canadian constitutional order – and then ended after one week. The asymmetry between what triggers coordination in each province, and how long it persists, shows the contrast between a labor movement in Quebec that entered the pandemic with continuously activated, generationally embedded networks, versus a labor movement in Ontario which began its network activation process in response to conditions after the pandemic.

British Columbia's latency operated through accommodation rather than resistance: the BC NDP government's labor-friendly institutional responsiveness channeled organizational energy toward productive institutional dialogue, removing the strategic pressure that elsewhere – in the US, in the UK – forced unions outward toward extra-institutional cross-sector coordination. The accommodation that avoided hostile confrontation also precluded the conditions under which cross-sector extra-contractual coordination becomes strategically necessary.

With its level of organizational infrastructure, Ireland's labor movement provides an analytically useful test of the activation-sequencing framework. With union density more than double the US rate and ICTU infrastructure linking affiliated unions across healthcare, education, transport, and public services, Ireland entered the pandemic with the highest organizational resource stock of any non-wave case in the study – and experienced the steepest post-pandemic strike decline: workers involved fell 89 percent

below the prior-decade average, working days lost fell 86 percent. Ireland's GFC was also the most severe in the study, with GDP declining approximately 11 percent and unemployment peaking at 15.1 percent under the IMF-EU Troika programme. Severity is a permissive condition for activation, not a sufficient one: the pre-existing social partnership ideology that had shaped ICTU's posture since 1987 channeled the GFC response into concessionary bargaining rather than cross-sector mobilization – the Croke Park Agreement of 2010 accepted significant pay cuts in exchange for no compulsory redundancies – producing the deepest institutional integration at the precise historical moment when the US and UK labor movements were activating their extra-institutional networks in the opposite direction.

Non-Wave Non-Rollback Cases

Australia and New Zealand test the necessity of the first condition. Both entered the post-pandemic period with activated coordination networks – Australia's through the ACTU's Change the Rules campaign of 2017–2019, which mobilized workers across forty unions in sustained cross-sector political campaigning that compelled the Morrison government to publicly respond; New Zealand's through the 2018–2019 strike wave that brought 70,000 workers out across genuinely distinct institutional domains in pursuit of Fair Pay Agreements legislation. In both cases, IV2 was present. In both cases, IV1 was absent: Australia's primary pandemic supports expired when CPI stood at 1.1 percent – below the Reserve Bank's target band – and real wages were marginally positive; New Zealand's primary income replacement program expired when CPI stood at 1.4 percent,

within the Reserve Bank's target band. The triggering condition was not met. No wave occurred in either case.

Within-Group Asymmetry

Within the non-wave group, however, a theoretically significant asymmetry is visible that bears directly on the framework's claims. Australia and New Zealand – both IV2=activated, both IV1=not premature – exhibited measurable growth in industrial activity relative to their immediately preceding baseline periods: Australia's working days lost rebounded from a historically depressed 64,400 in 2019 to 196,800 in 2022; New Zealand's workers-involved figure more than doubled from the prior decade average. Only Ireland – IV2=latent, IV1=premature – showed no growth at all, declining sharply from already-low pre-pandemic figures even as macroeconomic conditions warranted escalation. The asymmetry suggests that activated coordination networks generate sustained industrial pressure even in the absence of the wave-level triggering condition, while latent networks suppress even the grievance-driven activity that unfavorable macroeconomic conditions would otherwise produce. Activation matters below the wave threshold as well as at it.

Hypothesis Evaluation

Three hypotheses were posed in Chapter 2 as competing explanations for the distribution of wave and non-wave outcomes.

H1 – the Rollback Hypothesis – predicts that economically premature withdrawal of pandemic-era income supports drives the wave outcome. The evidence is consistent with H1 in the wave cases: the US, UK, and Quebec all experienced premature

rollback and all produced waves. It is also consistent with Australia and New Zealand, which did not experience premature rollback and produced no waves. The critical test comes from Ontario and British Columbia. Both provinces experienced identical premature rollback – the Canada Recovery Benefit expired on October 23, 2021, when CPI stood at 4.7 percent against a 2 percent Bank of Canada target and real wages were negative year-over-year – and neither produced a wave. Federal policy does not vary by province: Ontario and British Columbia faced the same rollback, on the same date, under the same macroeconomic conditions as Quebec. If premature rollback were sufficient to produce a wave, Ontario and British Columbia should have produced one alongside Quebec. They did not. H1 is retained as a necessary condition but falsified as a sufficient explanation. The rollback is real; its consequences depend on what it lands into.

H3 – the Mobilization Capacity Hypothesis – predicts that structurally stronger labor movements with higher union density, more institutionalized bargaining, and more favorable legal frameworks produce larger and more sustained waves. The US-UK comparison delivers the direct falsification. By every metric H3 treats as determinative – union density (9.9 percent vs. 22 percent), private-sector collective bargaining coverage (5.9 percent vs. 23 percent), peak-body architecture, legal environment – the US should produce a substantially smaller wave than the UK. The US produced 24.9 million strike days in 2023 alone, exceeding the UK's total across a nineteen-month wave period and surpassing the entire prior decade's combined US total. H3 fails in the opposite direction as well: if structural capacity predicted scale, the UK's advantages should have translated into a proportionally larger wave. They did not. The within-Canada comparison extends

the falsification: Ontario and British Columbia both have union density broadly comparable to Quebec's and more institutionally favorable provincial political contexts for portions of the period, yet produced no waves; Quebec, with a labor movement operating under anti-scab legislation but no structural resource advantages over its Ontario and BC counterparts, produced the largest strike wave in its recorded history. H3 predicts the wrong pattern with the wrong ordering across multiple comparison pairs simultaneously.

H3's failure is not merely a negative finding. The specific way it fails – with the study's structurally weakest movement producing its largest wave, and the best-resourced non-wave case (Ireland) producing the steepest decline – makes an affirmative argument: the variable that matters for wave occurrence is orthogonal to the structural capacity stock that H3 measures. Movements can be structurally weak and activationally live, or structurally strong and activationally latent, and the activation state predicts the wave outcome in both configurations. Structural capacity is not irrelevant – it traces to the morphology of each wave, shaping whether a wave takes the form of mega-strike concentration or distributed simultaneity – but it does not determine whether a wave occurs at all.

H2 – the Activation Sequencing Hypothesis – predicts that the conjunction of premature rollback and pre-activated coordination networks produces the wave outcome, and that the absence of either condition is sufficient to prevent one. H2 is consistent with all eight cases in the study without exception. It accounts for what H1 cannot – the within-Canada divergence, where identical rollback conditions produced opposite wave

outcomes as a function of network activation status – and for what H3 cannot – the US wave from the study's structurally weakest labor movement, and the absence of waves in Ireland and Ontario despite resource stocks that dwarf the US figures. H2 does not replace H1; it completes it. Premature rollback generates the grievance condition; the activation sequencing argument specifies what determines whether that grievance converts into synchronized cross-sector escalation or remains contained within isolated sectoral disputes. What H1 misses is the sequencing: rollback is necessary, but it must land into coordination networks that were already operationally exercised before the shock arrived. Where they were, it produced waves. Where they were not, it produced grievance without the organizational capacity to act on it at scale.

II. Theoretical Contributions.

The empirical chapters of this dissertation have been organized around a practical question – which cases produced post-pandemic strike waves and which did not – but the answer that emerges has implications that extend beyond the cases themselves. This section draws those implications out explicitly, stating what the activation sequencing framework contributes to four bodies of scholarship: the literature on strike wave cascade dynamics, the Power Resources Approach and its successive reformulations, the political economy of state construction in employment relations, and the comparative institutionalist treatment of equifinality in causal analysis. These are not separate contributions assembled from separate findings. They are different facets of the same core argument: that labor movement coordination is a dynamic variable with observable

activation states, and that treating it as such changes what the existing frameworks can explain.

Coordination Networks as a Dynamic Variable

The most foundational contribution the activation sequencing framework makes is also the most straightforward to state. The existing literature on strike waves, the Power Resources Approach, and the Varieties of Capitalism tradition each treats the organizational condition of labor movements as a background feature against which mobilization occurs – a stock of resources, a density figure, an institutional architecture – rather than as a variable with distinct states whose causal weight depends on its condition at a specific historical moment. The framework developed and tested here reconceptualizes inter-organizational coordination networks as occupying a dynamic activation state that can be coded, that varies across cases, and that conditions whether a shared exogenous shock converts into wave-level mobilization at all. This reconceptualization has a specific temporal implication: the question is not how much coordination capacity a labor movement possesses, but whether that capacity was being operationally exercised – not just structurally present – in the period immediately preceding a shock. The causal claim is explicitly sequential: prior activation is what makes rapid synchronized escalation possible when the triggering condition arrives. A coordination infrastructure that is being rebuilt in real time as the shock lands is not the same causal entity as one that was already live.

This is, in the language Chapter 1 establishes, a timing claim rather than a threshold claim. It does not predict that labor movements with more coordination

capacity produce larger waves. It predicts that labor movements with activated coordination capacity at shock onset produce waves, regardless of how much capacity they possess by static stock measures. The full case set confirms this: the structurally weakest labor movement in the study produced the largest wave by total strike time; the best-resourced labor movement in the non-wave group produced the steepest post-pandemic decline. The variable that accounts for this pattern is activation state, not resource quantity. What follows develops what this reframing means for the specific theoretical traditions the dissertation engages.

Cascade Condition: The Requirement for Extra-Legal Infrastructure

Biggs (2005) models strike waves as self-amplifying processes: once a critical mass of strikes occurs, information about employers' revealed vulnerability and workers' demonstrated capacity propagates through organizational and community networks, inducing further action that the initial grievance conditions alone could not have generated. Chapter 1 accepts this cascade logic as the foundational account of what distinguishes a wave from a spike or a surge, and notes that it "implicitly requires the activated organizational channels through which signal can travel." The Chapter 4 cases allow a more precise statement of what those channels must be capable of.

Australia and New Zealand both possessed activated coordination networks at pandemic onset. Within-sector cascade was operational in both cases: nurses struck and authorized further strike dates across successive rounds in both countries; teachers mounted successive stoppages in Australia in 2022; firefighters ran extended disputes in New Zealand. The intra-sector dynamics Biggs describes – early action demonstrating

feasibility, later action extending the precedent – were working. What did not occur was cross-sector propagation. The Australian dispute landscape of 2021–2024 records healthcare, education, transport, maritime, retail, energy, and law enforcement actions occurring in successive years without any instance of ACTU-coordinated general solidarity or cross-sector escalation. Each dispute ran its course within its own institutional track and resolved through enterprise bargaining or Fair Work Commission mechanisms. The cascade that Biggs's model requires for a wave – the dynamic in which later strikes in different sectors are partly caused by earlier strikes – did not materialize.

What limited the cascade was not the absence of activated inter-organizational ties but the enterprise bargaining architecture through which those ties were constrained to operate. Australia's Fair Work Act confines protected industrial action to single-employer enterprise bargaining disputes; New Zealand's Employment Relations Act operates through the same logic at the multi-employer level. The legal structure ensured that even where inter-organizational ties were operationally active, the signal they could carry was bounded by the employer-specific bargaining track. The channels were live; the architecture ensured they could not propagate signal across employer or sector boundaries.

This finding qualifies the cascade condition in a way the existing literature does not specify. The critical variable is not whether activated channels are present but whether those channels are capable of carrying cross-sector signal despite legal constraints. In the wave cases, they were: the Fight for $15 campaign operated through social movement coalitions that were not protected industrial action; the TUC's

coordinated cross-sector mobilization operated through campaign infrastructure rather than joint industrial action; Quebec's Common Front operated through the legally institutionalized common front mechanism that is the exception rather than the rule in the LME family. All three wave cases operated partly or entirely through extra-legal infrastructure that bypassed the single-employer constraint. The non-wave activated cases – Australia and New Zealand – operated through institutionally channeled networks oriented toward legislative processes rather than extra-legal solidarity. Activated networks that are exclusively institutionally channeled generate intra-sector cascades without generating cross-sector ones. The cascade condition the framework requires is more specific than Biggs's account identifies: activated channels are necessary but not sufficient; they must be the kind of channels capable of cross-sector propagation despite legal fragmentation.

The Ontario case adds a further specification. Where the framework predicts that latent networks produce sectorally bounded mobilization, the Ontario evidence documents the precise mechanism: sectorally bounded pre-pandemic coordination reproduced itself as sectorally bounded post-pandemic strike activity. Ontario's pre-pandemic organizational energy was concentrated in the education sector – the Bill 124 litigation, the 2019–2020 education bargaining disputes, the February 2020 joint teacher strike – and Ontario's post-pandemic disputes were concentrated in exactly the same sectors that had generated pre-pandemic activity: education, transit, retail, grocery. Latency does not produce undifferentiated organizational absence; it produces mobilization that mirrors the form of whatever coordination existed before the shock. The

organizational logic that shapes pre-pandemic coordination will go on to shape the organizational form of post-pandemic mobilization.

Ontario's process trace makes this legible: the activation sequencing framework predicts not just that latent cases will produce no wave, but that the specific sectoral character of pre-pandemic coordination will be reproduced in the sectoral character of post-pandemic conflict. The November 2022 episode adds a further theoretical observation. The sectorally bounded character of normal post-pandemic mobilization itself generated the pressure for reactive cross-sector coordination construction: the Ford government's legislative targeting of one sector created a political crisis sufficiently severe that the sectoral track could not contain it, and cross-sector solidarity was assembled reactively in response. This reactive construction dissolved when the immediate provocation was removed. It did not convert to sustained cross-sector network maintenance. But it documents that the pressure to construct cross-sector coordination can emerge endogenously from the sectorally bounded character of post-shock mobilization itself – a feedback mechanism the framework's current account of pre-pandemic activation does not anticipate.

Internal Differentiation of the Activation State: Activation Banking (Lévesque-Murray, Goods et al.)

Chapter 1 treats the activation state of coordination networks as a binary variable adequate for explaining wave occurrence: networks are either operationally active or latent at the moment of shock onset. The Chapter 4 cases reveal that this binary conceals a consequential distinction within the activated state that matters for predicting what form

industrial conflict takes even when a wave is not produced – and, more importantly, what organizational resources a movement carries forward from one political cycle to the next.

Korpi's (1985) three-stage model – mobilization of resources, maintenance in a form ready for use, and application – locates the framework's contribution at the maintenance stage. The cases reveal that maintenance is not a unitary condition. Two observably distinct modes of maintenance operate across the activated cases in this study, with different implications for what kind of action becomes possible when a triggering shock arrives.

The US and UK activations were adversarially-oriented: both produced through sustained hostile pressure that compelled extra-institutional coordination precisely because formal channels were inadequate or unavailable. The Fight for $15 campaign, Labor Notes networks, and UAW reform caucuses were built against nationally coordinated employer opposition; the TUC's cross-sector campaign infrastructure was built against a decade of government-imposed pay restraint. Maintenance in both cases meant repeated, practically exercised cross-sector solidarity. The organizational habits those networks sustained – synchronized action, cross-sector tactical diffusion, personnel mobility across organizational boundaries – were the same habits the wave required. Australia and New Zealand's activations were institutionally-oriented: both produced through campaigns targeting sympathetic governments and legislative agendas, and maintained through engagement with those agendas under the Ardern and Albanese governments. The inter-organizational ties, shared organizing cadres, and peak-body

coordination infrastructure remained operationally present; their practical exercise was directed toward institutional channels rather than adversarial extra-legal solidarity.

The distinction matters because these two modes of maintenance do not preserve the same organizational capacities. Adversarially-oriented maintenance continuously exercises the cross-sector solidarity habits that a wave requires. Institutionally-oriented maintenance preserves the organizational infrastructure of those habits – the inter-union relationships, the shared strategic personnel, the institutional memory – while directing their practical energy elsewhere. The claim this dissertation develops is that institutionally-oriented maintenance is not the equivalent of latency: it banks wave-producing capacity in institutional channels rather than exercising it continuously in extra-legal solidarity. Activation banking is the term for this: the condition in which coordination infrastructure capable of producing wave-level mobilization is maintained through institutionally-channeled exercise that preserves the relational substrate without continuously deploying it toward cross-sector industrial escalation.

Quebec's Common Front provides the paradigm case of activation banking across the longest available time horizon. Between formal Common Front bargaining rounds – and even within the fragmented 2019–20 non-Common Front round – the organizational infrastructure of cross-sector coordination was maintained through joint legal actions, solidarity protocols, and inter-central non-raiding agreements. The April 2019 solidarity protocol, the January 2020 joint pay equity Superior Court challenge, and the November 2020 joint visibility action document that the relational substrate was kept operational even when no formal Common Front was in place and even as the major centrales

bargained separately. What the Common Front mechanism institutionalizes is precisely activation banking: the legal and organizational architecture that embeds cross-sector coordination as the default operating mode of Quebec's public sector labor relations, ensuring that the wave-producing capacity of the coordination infrastructure is banked between deployment episodes rather than lapsing into genuine latency.

New Zealand's post-2023 trajectory provides the activation banking concept's most direct test from the opposite direction. When the National-ACT coalition repealed the Fair Pay Agreements Act in December 2023, the legal channel through which activation had been maintained was closed. Industrial escalation followed within months: new strike activity, renewed CTU advocacy for legislative restoration, and heightened public sector confrontation. The institutionally-banked capacity converted to industrial expression as soon as the institutional channel was foreclosed. This transition is what the banking concept predicts: the organizational habits and inter-union relationships maintained through FPA engagement did not evaporate with the legislation; they redirected.

The activation banking concept extends Goods, Veen, Barratt, and Smith's (2024) two-state model of coalitional power resources in a direction their account does not anticipate. Goods et al. argue that coalitional resources exist in either latent or active states. The cases here suggest a three-state model is needed: latent (Ireland), institutionally-activated or banked (Australia and New Zealand under sympathetic governments), and adversarially-activated (US and UK throughout the 2010s). The operative distinction for predicting wave occurrence remains the binary between latent

and activated, since the banked state preserves the capacity for cross-sector escalation that latency forecloses. But the distinction between banked and adversarially-activated matters for predicting the speed and character of that escalation when the triggering condition arrives. An adversarially-activated network – one that has been continuously exercising cross-sector solidarity in practice – can deploy immediately and at scale. A banked network retains the relational substrate but requires the institutional channel to close before the practical habit of adversarial coordination is re-exercised.

Direction of Deployment as a Consequential Variable (Lévésque-Murray, extended)

Lévésque and Murray (2010) develop the possession/use distinction as a binary: unions either deploy their resources for cross-sector mobilization or they do not. The Chapter 4 cases establish that the direction of deployment – toward which channels, through which organizational forms, in pursuit of which goals – shapes the observable industrial output even when the fundamental possession/use distinction places cases on the same side of the binary.

Australia and New Zealand were both coded IV2=Activated. Both possessed inter-organizational coordination ties that were operationally exercised. Both produced below-wave industrial conflict in the post-pandemic period. But the forms of that conflict differed substantially in ways that trace directly to the channel through which activation was maintained. Australia's enterprise-bargaining-channeled maintenance produced sector-specific, institutionally-resolved disputes across a progressively wider range of sectors – a broadening footprint without cross-sector escalation. New Zealand's FPA-process-channeled maintenance produced fewer but longer disputes, with average dispute

duration substantially above historical norms, as workers and unions held positions in anticipation of the legislative outcome that individual contract negotiations could not produce. Same activation state, different maintenance channel, observably different industrial form. The possession/use distinction as Lévésque and Murray develop it captures the Ireland-Australia contrast – Ireland possessed resources and did not use them; Australia possessed resources and did – but not the Australia-New Zealand contrast, which requires attending to the direction and mode of use rather than merely its presence.

This extension carries an implication that the framework's IV2 coding does not fully capture. Two cases can receive identical IV2 codings while producing observably distinct forms of below-wave industrial pressure, precisely because the direction of their networks' deployment differs. Attending to direction of use – toward institutional channels or toward extra-legal solidarity infrastructure – is what distinguishes the activation banking concept from simple activation and what distinguishes the banked state from the adversarially-activated one.

Underexploitation of Industrial Coordination Infrastructure (Frangi et al., extended)

Frangi, Masi, and Poirier (2023), in their analysis of Quebec union societal networks, document that labor movements may possess extensive ties without strategically deploying them – what they term the underexploitation of societal network potential as a structural pattern rather than an exceptional failure. Their finding pertains specifically to societal power ties: the horizontal connections between unions and

community organizations, social movement actors, and civil society groups. The Chapter 4 cases extend this pattern from societal ties to industrial coordination networks themselves.

Ireland is the exemplar. With union density of approximately 22 percent – more than double Australia's and substantially above New Zealand's – and ICTU infrastructure linking affiliated unions across healthcare, education, transport, and public services under a shared confederation, Ireland entered the pandemic with the highest organizational resource stock of any non-wave case in the study. It experienced the steepest post-pandemic industrial decline: workers involved fell 89 percent below the prior-decade average, working days lost fell 86 percent. Ireland did not merely underexploit its societal network potential in Frangi et al.'s sense; it underexploited its industrial coordination infrastructure across an entire post-pandemic period in which macroeconomic conditions – premature rollback, 9.2 percent CPI by mid-2022, negative real wages – objectively warranted escalation. The authorization-to-execution gap is the quantitative signature: a 14 percent execution rate on authorized industrial actions in 2021 documents that member willingness to authorize existed and organizational leadership systematically redirected it toward WRC engagement rather than industrial expression.

The theoretical implication is that the underexploitation pattern Frangi et al. identify in the societal power dimension of the PRA typology characterizes the industrial coordination dimension in cases where the strategic orientation of leadership has been shaped by a long prior period of institutional partnership. The ICTU's two decades of social partnership involvement produced not a deficit of resources but a strategic

disposition that treated concertation as the default organizational register, regardless of whether the concertation channel was still structurally available. When social partnership formally ended in 2008, the behavioral legacy of concertation-as-default survived the institutional structure that had produced it. The coordination infrastructure remained; the strategic orientation that would have directed it toward industrial expression did not reset. Ireland's post-pandemic underexploitation is not a failure of organizational capacity but a consequence of the ideological legacy that two decades of social partnership deposited in the strategic orientation of ICTU's leadership – a legacy durable enough to suppress industrial expression even in the face of acute macroeconomic grievance.

State Construction and Durability of Coordination Infrastructure (Howell)

Howell (2021) argues that the state's active role in constructing and reconstructing employment relations has been systematically undertheorized – that coordination infrastructure is not simply inherited through institutional path-dependence but actively built and dismantled through political decisions. The Chapter 4 and 5 cases provide the clearest empirical demonstrations of this argument available in the post-pandemic literature, and they do so on timelines compressed enough to make the causal mechanism unusually legible.

New Zealand's Fair Pay Agreements Act was enacted in December 2022 and repealed in December 2023 – thirteen months between Royal Assent and repeal, with zero Fair Pay Agreements concluded in the interval. This is not a gradual institutional drift of the kind that liberalization scholarship documents across decades; it is a deliberate political demolition of coordination infrastructure on a timeline of months,

followed by its equally deliberate partial reconstruction under the Equal Pay Amendment Act of May 2025, which reversed the Act passed under the same government just weeks prior. The NZ case makes visible a claim that the longer arc of institutional change in other cases obscures: the state can unmake coordination infrastructure faster than the organizational habits that infrastructure was intended to produce can form. Pierson's (2000) path-dependence account anticipates that institutional arrangements become self-sustaining as complementary adaptations accumulate; Howell's argument is that those adaptations require time, and that deliberate political dismantling can outrun them. Ireland's social partnership required twenty-two years to produce the behavioral legacy that outlasted its formal dissolution. New Zealand's Fair Pay Agreements required twelve months, and produced no behavioral legacy at all – there was nothing to outlast the repeal because no agreements, expectations, or organizational adaptations had formed around the legislation in the time available.

Quebec's Bill 89, passed May 29, 2025 and effective November 30, 2025, provides the second demonstration – in real time, against an already-established coordination infrastructure rather than an incipient one. The legislation expanded the definition of essential services beyond health and safety to the vague standard of the "well-being of the population," granted the Labour Minister power to unilaterally end strikes and impose binding arbitration whenever deemed necessary, and permitted public-sector lockouts for the first time in modern Quebec labor history. The Montreal transit strike of October–November 2025 provided its first operational test. STM management declined to move on salary and subcontracting demands, calculating – correctly, as

Alexandre Leduc (Québec Solidaire) observed in real time – that waiting for Bill 89's November 30 implementation was a superior strategy to settling. The legislation chilled bargaining before it was formally in force. The CAQ government's motivation was explicit in its own public communications: Quebec had accounted for 91 percent of Canadian work stoppages between 2023 and 2025 against a historical baseline of 56 percent, and the government concluded that the cost of leaving the Common Front infrastructure's legal conditions intact exceeded the cost of the constitutional challenge its dismantling would invite. Howell's argument is confirmed in both directions simultaneously: political decisions built the legal conditions under which activated coordination infrastructure could produce binding industrial outcomes; political decisions are now systematically dismantling those conditions. The symmetry is not incidental – it is the mechanism Howell identifies, operating at the provincial level and on a timeline short enough to observe directly.

Active Membership and Resolution of Strength-Weakness Ambiguity (Arnholtz and Refslund)

Kelly (1998) identifies a fundamental ambiguity in the classical literature: strike wave occurrence is a poor guide to the underlying strength of the labor movement producing it, because waves can emerge from defensive mobilization – from the logic of Polanyian protection rather than from structural advantage. The post-pandemic period makes this ambiguity concrete in a way that prior scholarship had not confronted at this scale. If strikes are read as a sign of structural strength, the Quebec wave is explicable but the US wave is not. If strikes are read as an expression of structural weakness, the US

wave is explicable but the Quebec wave is not. The two readings together generate no consistent prediction across the case set.

The activation sequencing framework resolves this ambiguity by identifying the variable that the strength-weakness dichotomy obscures. The US wave was produced by a labor movement operating from a position of structural weakness – 9.9 percent union density, the hostile post-Janus legal environment, the most restrictive private-sector organizing conditions in the study – and through coordination networks that were adversarially activated precisely because formal channels were inadequate. Weber and Wasner's (2023) sellers' inflation framework correctly characterizes the grievance structure: workers were defending declining real purchasing power, not advancing from structural advantage. But the defensive character of the grievance does not determine whether a wave occurs; the activation state of the coordination network into which the grievance lands does. Arnholtz and Refslund (2022) provide the theoretical bridge: the sheer number of union members is not enough to characterize associational power – it also depends on whether members are active and willing to act, and on the effectiveness of coordination and internal cohesion. The US case instantiates this precisely – a smaller, less-resourced movement whose networks had been more recently and intensively exercised against hostile adversaries produced a larger wave than a denser, better-resourced movement whose coordination had been oriented toward institutional engagement. What matters is not how many members are on the rolls but whether those members and their organizations are actively exercising coordination in the specific mode that wave-level escalation requires.

The framework's resolution of the ambiguity is that structural position leaves a trace not in wave occurrence but in wave morphology. Structurally weak movements activated through adversarial extra-institutional networks produce concentrated mega-strike waves: depth within targeted sectors, novel-terrain penetration through trained organizers, sequential escalation designed to maximize disruption at the adversary's most profitable points. Structurally stronger movements activated through peak-body institutional machinery produce distributed simultaneous waves: broad cross-sector coordination, synchronized action dates, wide geographic dispersion across many workplaces. Both patterns constitute waves; they are the morphological fingerprints of distinct activation pathways operating through the same conjunctural logic.

Equifinality: Same Conjunction, Distinct Pathways, Distinct Morphologies

The US-UK within-configuration comparison speaks to the comparative institutionalist literature on equifinality – the condition in which the same causal combination is realized through institutionally distinct mechanisms, producing comparable outcomes with distinct morphological characteristics.

Both countries entered the post-pandemic period with IV1=Premature and IV2=Activated. Both produced waves. The activation pathways were entirely different: the UK's through formal TUC peak-body machinery, adversarially oriented toward a decade of austerity government; the US's through informal horizontal rank-and-file networks, adversarially oriented toward nationally coordinated employer opposition. These are not variants of the same organizational form – they are structurally distinct coordination mechanisms that happen to have produced the same activation state. What

the equifinality model establishes is that the activation state (IV2=Activated) explains wave occurrence, while the activation pathway explains wave character. The UK's TUC coordination machinery is structurally optimized for breadth and simultaneity – Congress mandates synchronize ballot timing across thirty-plus affiliates, producing action that hits on the same day across education, transport, and healthcare, distributed across 34,424 unique workplaces in 2022 and 2,137 instances of action across the full wave period. The US's reform caucus and conference network infrastructure is structurally optimized for depth and sector-specific penetration – UAWD in the UAW, TDU in the Teamsters, the Inside Organizer School in the Starbucks chain – producing a small number of very large, sustained actions that accounted for 96.8 percent of all 2023 strike days. Kallas's (2023) finding that strike form reflects available coordination capacity is confirmed at wave scale and extended: it is not merely the form of individual strikes but the morphology of entire waves that reflects the coordination infrastructure through which they propagate.

The equifinality finding simultaneously confirms two things:

- First, the LME coordination problem that Hall and Soskice (2001) diagnose – the absence of institutionalized mechanisms for synchronizing action across sectors – is contingently solvable rather than structurally unsolvable within LME conditions. Two distinct constructed pathways, neither of them institutionally guaranteed by LME architecture, both produced IV2=Activated states sufficient for wave-level mobilization.

- Second, the path to activation leaves an organizational trace that is not erased by the shared causal logic. The same conjunction – premature rollback meeting activated networks – produces waves; those waves take different forms depending on the

organizational channels responsible for achieving and maintaining activation. A QCA analysis alone cannot see this distinction; it takes the process-tracing comparison within the shared configuration to make it visible.

III. Methodological Matters.

Three-Criterion Dependent Variable Definition

The strike wave literature has operated for decades with a definitional deficit that Hodder and Mustchin (2024) identify as a feature of the field rather than an oversight of any individual study: wave designations are routinely grounded in the self-evident character of the data against historical baselines, without specifying how much escalation is required to cross the threshold from notable surge to wave. The closest thing to a canonical threshold is Shorter and Tilly's (1974) requirement that both work stoppages and workers involved grow by at least 50 percent relative to the prior five-year average. This definition encounters two structural problems when applied to twenty-first-century liberal market economies that had undergone decades of baseline compression through liberalization, casualization, and the erosion of collective bargaining coverage. First, a 50 percent increase from a historically depressed baseline can reflect a modest absolute recovery – reversion toward a longer-run mean – rather than a genuine episode of expanded mobilization. Vandaele (2016) documents precisely this dynamic across European strike trends: percentage-change benchmarks calibrated to high-conflict environments systematically overstate the significance of small absolute movements from low bases. Second, the five-year comparison window is vulnerable to single anomalous

years: a trough in the baseline period artificially deflates the comparison average, making it easy for subsequent years to exceed the threshold without genuine escalation having occurred.

The three-criterion definition developed in Chapter 2 addresses both problems through a conjunction requirement. Criterion 1 – robust exceptionalism against the prior decade – establishes that post-pandemic activity must exceed the 2010–2019 decade average by at least 100 percent in at least one metric in at least one year, surpass prior decade peak values across at least three metric-year instances, and maintain or exceed decade averages across all three standard metrics simultaneously. The decade-long comparison window is the structural defense against baseline compression: it cannot be distorted by a single anomalous trough in the way a five-year window can. Criterion 2 – disjuncture from pre-pandemic trends – establishes that post-pandemic activity must represent a genuine break from the trajectory established in 2018 and 2019, not merely a continuation of a trend already underway before March 2020.

The methodological necessity of the conjunction – and specifically of Criterion 1 – is demonstrated by Australia. In Australia's case, Criterion 2 alone is satisfied: working days lost rebounded from a historically depressed 64,400 in 2019 to 196,800 in 2022, more than doubling the 2018–2019 average and producing an apparent discontinuity from the immediate pre-pandemic baseline. A Shorter-Tilly test or a single-criterion Criterion 2 check would classify Australia as a post-pandemic strike wave case. But the Criterion 2 result is an artifact of baseline selection. Australia's 2018–2019 period was anomalously quiet even against its own declining-trend baseline; the prior decade's average working

days lost was approximately 158,000, substantially above the 2022 figure that appears elevated only by comparison to the immediately preceding trough. Criterion 1 provides the corrective: the 2022 peak fell 28 percent below the 2012 prior-decade high; no metric surpassed its prior decade maximum across the required three instances; post-pandemic workers-involved and disputes figures declined marginally below decade averages. Measured against the full decade rather than its most depressed years, Australia's post-pandemic activity is not exceptional – it is reversion toward the historical mean. Criterion 2 produces a false positive; Criterion 1 catches it.

A third criterion, sectoral dispersion, makes explicit what the first two criteria leave implicit. The wave definition established above requires more workers, from more walks of life, going on more strikes for more days: all four dimensions must move together. Criteria 1 and 2 operationalize three of these dimensions through aggregate metrics – the scale of escalation against the prior decade baseline, and the disjuncture from immediately preceding trends. The "more walks of life" dimension is present in the definition but not yet directly measured: aggregate figures for workers involved and person-days lost can be elevated by intensification within sectors already active in the baseline period, without any new actors having entered the conflict. Criterion 3 measures it directly.

Drawing on Biggs's (2003, 2005) cascade logic and Chang and Lee's (2021) betweenness centrality operationalization – both of which identify cross-sector spread as the defining property that distinguishes a wave from a spike or surge – and consistent with how Hodder and Mustchin (2024) and Rutherford (2024) ground their respective

wave designations in the documented entry of previously quiescent sectors into the conflict, Criterion 3 requires that post-pandemic strike activity show evidence of spread to workers and sectors with no significant strike history in the 2010–2019 baseline period. A case whose post-pandemic escalation is concentrated entirely within sectors already present in the baseline record has not demonstrated the "more walks of life" dimension the definition requires, regardless of how large its aggregate figures are.

Subnational Design as Quasi-Controlled Comparison

This dissertation's inferential logic relies most heavily on the within-Canada comparison. Cross-national comparative designs, as practiced in chapter 3 (UK vs US) and chapter 4 (Australia, Ireland, and New Zealand) face an inescapable problem: cases that differ on the outcome variable almost always differ on multiple potential explanatory variables simultaneously, making it difficult to isolate any single variable as the causal factor rather than a correlate of the true explanation. Cross-national designs constantly have to grapple with multiple potential confounders.

The within-Canada comparison mitigates these confounders. Quebec, Ontario, and British Columbia share a federal institutional framework, receive identical federal economic policy, experienced the same Canada Recovery Benefit expiry on the same date under the same macroeconomic conditions, face the same LME institutional heritage, and are embedded in the same national labor law tradition at the federal level. The Canada Recovery Benefit expired on October 23, 2021, for all three provinces simultaneously; CPI stood at 4.7 percent against a 2 percent Bank of Canada target for all three provinces on the same date; real wages were negative year-over-year for workers in

all three provinces at the same moment. IV1 does not vary across these three cases. Federal economic policy, macroeconomic conditions, and the timing of rollback are held constant by institutional design – not by case selection strategy, but by the structure of Canadian federalism itself. The only variable available to account for divergent DV outcomes is IV2: the activation status of labor movement coordination networks.

This methodological asset is unavailable in any cross-national comparison the dissertation conducts. The US-UK comparison is the most similar in terms of shared institutional heritage, but the two countries differ on union density, legal framework, peak-body architecture, inflation trajectory, and the specific timing and mechanism of pandemic support withdrawal. All of those differences are manageable through careful case selection and process tracing, but none of them can be eliminated.

Scope Conditions and Boundary Cases

The activation sequencing framework is calibrated to a specific institutional setting and tested on a specific historical episode. Specifying what the framework cannot explain, and where its analytical leverage requires supplementary accounts, is part of stating the contribution accurately.

The LME scope condition: the framework's root premise is that coordination in liberal market economies is contingent rather than institutionally embedded: in the absence of mechanisms that routinely require inter-organizational coordination – centralized wage-setting, legally mandated sectoral bargaining, peak-body concertation – coordination must be constructed and maintained through deliberate organizational effort. This is the baseline condition that makes variation in network activation analytically

consequential. Where labor movement coordination is institutionalized as the normal operating mode of industrial relations – as in archetypal coordinated market economies such as Germany, the Nordic countries, or Austria – the framework's core independent variable approaches a constant rather than a variable. If coordination is guaranteed by the institutional architecture, the question of whether networks are activated is answered in advance by the architecture itself, and activation sequencing has no explanatory work to do.

Extending the framework to CME settings would therefore require rethinking the baseline assumption from which it proceeds. It is possible that activation sequencing logic operates at a more micro level within CME settings – distinguishing, for example, between sectors or firms within a coordinated system that are more or less deeply integrated into the coordination mechanisms – but this would require a reconceptualization of what activation means in an environment where some baseline level of coordination is institutionally guaranteed. The framework as developed here makes its strongest contribution in LME settings precisely because those settings make the activation state of coordination networks observable as a variable rather than as a constant.

New Zealand and Boundary Case Complexity

New Zealand is the case that most directly tests the definitional architecture rather than the causal architecture. IV2 is coded Activated: the 2018–2019 strike wave satisfying all three conditions, the CTU's FPA legislative campaign demonstrating cross-sector coordination in pursuit of statutory goals, and the political compulsion of both

Labour and National to respond publicly to the mobilization. IV1 is coded Not Premature: the COVID-19 Income Relief Payment expired in November 2020 when CPI stood at 1.4 percent within the Reserve Bank's target band. The framework's causal logic therefore predicts no wave, and no wave is the observed outcome.

What makes New Zealand genuinely complex is not the coding but the interpretation of the outcome. New Zealand's post-pandemic strike metrics do not fall below its prior decade baseline; they continue the elevated trajectory that the 2018–2019 domestic political cycle had already established. Criterion 1 is partially satisfied – workers involved more than doubled from the prior decade average – but Criterion 2 is not: there is no upward inflection from the 2018–2019 baseline, because the 2018–2019 baseline was already elevated. The post-pandemic period in New Zealand is not a downturn, and it is not business as usual against a low baseline; it is a continuation of an already-active trajectory that the pandemic did not meaningfully disrupt. What is absent is specifically the kind of post-pandemic escalation – a disjuncture from immediately preceding trends – that the DV definition requires for a case to qualify as a post-pandemic strike wave.

This means that New Zealand's non-wave outcome is not evidence of organizational incapacity or institutional containment; it is evidence of organizational continuity from an already-elevated starting point. The framework's prediction for NZ holds – no post-pandemic wave, because the triggering condition was absent – but the mechanism is continuity rather than suppression. The case tests the definitional boundary of "post-pandemic wave" more than it tests the causal logic of the framework itself, and

any reader who found the DV coding for NZ questionable would be raising a definitional rather than a causal objection.

Ireland: Permissive-Not-Sufficient Condition for GFC Severity

Ireland entered the pandemic with union density more than double the US rate, formal ICTU infrastructure linking unions across all major sectors, and the most severe Global Financial Crisis of any case in the study – GDP declining approximately 11 percent between 2008 and 2010, unemployment peaking at 15.1 percent under the Troika program. It produced the steepest post-pandemic strike decline in the study. This configuration is the framework's boundary condition for one of the more intuitive accounts of activation: that GFC severity, by delegitimizing established strategies and drawing new actors into organizing fields, produces activated networks. In the US and UK, the GFC plausibly played this role. In Ireland, the same or greater severity produced the opposite outcome – deeper institutional integration rather than extra-institutional activation.

The implication the framework draws from Ireland is that GFC severity is a permissive condition for activation, not a sufficient one. Whether a severe economic crisis produces activated coordination networks or deeper institutional integration depends on the pre-existing ideological configuration of the labor movement at the moment of crisis. Ireland's ICTU had operated as a social partner since 1987; when the GFC arrived, that posture channeled the crisis response into concessionary bargaining under the Croke Park Agreement rather than into the kind of cross-sector mobilization the US and UK movements built during the same period. The same historical event – a

severe economic crisis requiring urgent organizational response – produced activation in adversarial institutional contexts and demobilization in concertation-conditioned ones. The critical juncture account requires this specification: severity opens the possibility of activation; the pre-existing strategic orientation of the movement determines which direction the juncture points.

Australia: Confirming the Triggering Condition's Necessity

Australia is in one sense the framework's methodologically cleanest case, precisely because it is the case where the argument is least in tension with itself. Activation is clearly documented – the Change the Rules campaign is one of the most thoroughly evidenced IV2 codings in the study – and the non-wave outcome is clearly observed. The explanation is direct: the triggering condition was absent. Australia's pandemic supports were withdrawn when CPI stood at 1.1 percent, below the Reserve Bank's target band, and real wages were marginally positive. No other case in the study had even one macroeconomic indicator in a favorable zone at the moment of rollback; Australia had all of them simultaneously.

Australia therefore confirms the necessity of the triggering condition in the most direct way available: an activated labor movement facing no macroeconomic grievance at rollback produced no wave. That the ACTU's Change the Rules infrastructure was then deployed toward the Albanese government's legislative agenda (e.g. Secure Jobs Better Pay, Closing Loopholes), rather than toward industrial escalation, confirms the activation banking logic: institutionally-channeled maintenance preserved the organizational substrate without exercising it toward the industrial form the wave definition requires.

Australia provides no puzzle for the framework and no complication of its predictions. Its value is confirmatory rather than challenging.

What the Framework Does Not Explain

Three explanatory gaps are worth naming honestly. First, the framework predicts wave occurrence but does not predict settlement quality. Quebec's Common Front mobilization of 420,000 workers produced wage increases of 17.4 percent over five years against an initial government offer of 9 percent – an outcome that rank-and-file participants described as falling short of aspirations even as it substantially exceeded the government's unchanged position. UK wave settlements ranged from the teachers' 6.5 percent – accepted as the best achievable but acknowledged as below inflation – to the junior doctors' eventual 22.3 percent, secured only after a change of government. The framework's claim is that activated networks enable the kind of synchronized escalation that creates leverage for improved outcomes; it makes no prediction about how much of that leverage translates into settlement gains, which depends on employer and government financial positions, political calculations, and bargaining dynamics that the framework does not model.

Second, the framework also does not address the long-run sustainability of activated networks in the post-wave period. Three distinct trajectories were visible in the study's cases as of the evidence window: the UK wave settling into a Labour government that normalized labor relations; the US wave moderating through 2024 to elevated-but-not-exceptional levels; and Quebec facing the deliberate legislative dismantling of the legal conditions under which its Common Front infrastructure produces binding

outcomes. These trajectories suggest that the post-wave activation state is itself a variable – that waves can deplete, reinforce, or be exogenously disrupted by state action – but the framework as developed here is calibrated to the pre-wave condition and does not model what comes after.

Finally, the framework does not explain the specific timing of activation events within the pre-pandemic window. It establishes that US labor coordination networks were activated through a decade of compounding GFC-aftermath organizing and that UK networks were activated through the austerity campaign; it does not explain why the activating events occurred when they did rather than earlier or later, or why specific episodes served as activation markers rather than predecessors or successors. The critical juncture and forcing mechanism accounts in Chapter 1 provide partial historical explanations, but the framework itself is indifferent to the specific timing of activation within the pre-pandemic decade – it requires only that activation be established before March 2020, not that it be established at any particular point in that window.

IV. Limitations and Future Research.

In addition to any unconscious or inadvertent limitations, the design of this study includes four conscious limitations.

First is the small-N constraint. The study encompasses eight analytical units across six countries. QCA is the method appropriate for this scale of comparison – it is precisely designed for the number of cases available – and the case set covers the full population of LMEs that experienced the post-pandemic period with both wave and non-

wave outcomes, making the universe of relevant cases coextensive with the cases analyzed. But eight units cannot support the kind of probabilistic generalization that large-N statistical analysis enables, and the conjunctural pattern the truth table establishes, while consistent across all eight cases without exception, cannot be shown to hold with statistical confidence in the way a larger population would permit. The framework generates hypotheses that larger-N designs can test (e.g. a US state-level extension), but those extensions remain future work. The eight-case finding is the foundation of the theoretical argument, not its completed empirical verification.

A second limitation is measurement challenges in IV2 coding. Activation status is coded on the presence of documented cross-sector coordination events that satisfy all three conditions simultaneously before March 2020. The evidentiary record is not equally rich across cases. English-language sources are more accessible than French-language sources for certain dimensions of the Quebec material; Irish and New Zealand archival coverage of cross-sector coordination activity varies in depth; and the absence of a documented coordination event in the pre-cutoff record may in some instances reflect archival gaps or media coverage limitations rather than genuine latency. The burden-of-proof heuristic – coding latent where the record is ambiguous – addresses this risk asymmetrically. It guards against false positives, coding activation where the evidence is insufficient to establish it, but it creates a systematic risk of false negatives: coding latency where activation occurred but left a thinner archival footprint than the study's best-documented cases. The activations most at risk of undercoding under this protocol are those that operated through diffuse interpersonal networks rather than through formal

organizations with public communications archives. The US and UK activations are the best-documented in the study precisely because they operated through organizations – Labor Notes, TUC, ACTU – that produced extensive contemporaneous records. A case where activation operated primarily through informal inter-union personal relationships and private coordination would satisfy the same three conditions, and might be coded latent under the protocol applied here if contemporaneous public evidence of those relationships did not reach the archival record.

There is also the evidentiary challenge of sequencing claims. The framework's causal claim is explicitly temporal: prior activation at a specific historical moment conditions whether a shared shock converts into wave-level mobilization. Establishing this requires evidence of a specific organizational state at a specific time, and that evidence is inevitably uneven across cases. For the UK, the N30 activation marker of November 30, 2011 is documented with unusual precision: Eurofound's contemporaneous institutional analysis, TUC internal documents, and contemporaneous academic accounts establish both the event and the TUC's specific operational role in coordinating it. For the US, the November 29, 2012 New York fast-food strike is similarly well-documented through SEIU communications, contemporaneous journalism, and NELP retrospectives. For Quebec, the September 2019 Lutte Commune climate action is documented primarily through the Labor Notes contemporaneous account and union federation communications. The sequencing claim is equally valid across these cases, but the evidentiary richness with which the temporal sequence can be demonstrated varies. Cases where the activation marker is less precisely dated, or where

the connection between the pre-pandemic marker and the wave-period mobilization must be inferred through organizational genealogy rather than demonstrated through named personnel continuity, offer less direct confirmation of the temporal logic even where the substance of the claim is analytically equivalent.

Finally, there is the matter of wave occurrence versus wave outcomes. The dissertation's dependent variable is binary: a labor movement either produced a post-pandemic strike wave or it did not. This operationalization is appropriate for the question the dissertation asks – what explains the distribution of wave and non-wave outcomes – but it means the framework cannot speak to variation within the wave category. Quebec's Common Front produced a settlement of 17.4 percent over five years against a government opening offer that had not moved from 9 percent in three years. The UK wave produced settlements ranging from 6.5 percent for teachers – widely characterized as below inflation even by the unions that accepted it – to 22.3 percent for junior doctors, secured only after a change of government. The US wave produced record contracts at all three Detroit automakers alongside ongoing Starbucks bargaining characterized by employer delay, partial compliance, and contested implementation. These are substantially different outcomes for movements that the framework codes identically at the DV level. The factors that determine how much of a wave's leverage translates into settlement gains – employer and government financial positions, the specific legal terrain of each dispute, the sophistication of particular bargaining teams, and the political context of resolution – are not part of the framework's causal architecture. Settlement variation is the adjacent question the framework opens rather than answers.

Future Research Directions

Five directions emerge from the empirical and theoretical work developed in this dissertation, each addressing a specific explanatory gap identified in the preceding chapters:

- Testing in non-LME settings. The framework is calibrated to institutional settings where labor movement coordination is contingent rather than embedded. The most productive immediate extension is a test in CME settings that vary on the degree to which coordination is institutionally embedded, examining whether activation sequencing logic operates at a more micro level within a coordinated system – between sectors, between unions, or between regions – rather than being absorbed by the institutional baseline. Germany is the most analytically tractable candidate. The dual system of works councils and sectoral collective bargaining produces genuine variation in the depth and character of inter-organizational coordination across sectors and Länder against a background of shared national-level wage-setting framework. The framework would ask whether sectors and regions with more recently and intensively exercised coordination networks produced greater industrial pressure during the post-pandemic cost-of-living crisis than those where sectoral coordination, while institutionally present, had become pro forma. Höpner, Di Carlo, and Hassel's (2024) analysis of Germany's coordinated wage response to post-pandemic inflation through institutional rather than industrial channels provides the baseline against which a micro-level activation sequencing test could be developed.

- Developing the activation banking typology. The activation banking concept identifies a condition – institutionally-channeled maintenance of wave-producing

capacity – that the existing binary of activated and latent does not capture. Developing this concept requires a systematic typology that specifies at minimum three trajectories: banking, in which coordination capacity is maintained through institutional channels that preserve the relational substrate without continuously exercising it for cross-sector industrial escalation; spending, in which sustained wave-level mobilization depletes organizational resources, member energy, and inter-union trust in ways that the post-wave period does not automatically restore; and lapsing, in which coordination capacity erodes gradually through strategic reorientation, organizational fragmentation, or the displacement of adversarial repertoires by concertation habits. Quebec, New Zealand, and Ireland represent the three trajectories across the study's evidence window: Quebec's Common Front as the paradigm case of banking across inter-round periods; New Zealand's post-FPA repeal activation as evidence that banked capacity can convert to deployment when institutional channels are foreclosed; and Ireland's social partnership legacy as the clearest case of lapsing documented in the study. Quebec's post-Bill 89 trajectory is where this research question is most urgently live: the legislation is attempting to convert a well-banked coordination infrastructure into a lapsed one through deliberate legal dismantling, and the outcome of that attempt will depend on exactly the durability conditions the typology needs to specify.

- Post-wave network trajectories. This dissertation establishes the conditions under which pre-pandemic activation produces a post-pandemic wave. It does not establish what happens to the activation state of coordination networks after the wave resolves. The three wave cases offer structurally distinct post-wave environments that together

constitute a natural comparative test. The UK wave settled into a Labour government that restored junior doctors' pay, passed the Employment Rights Bill, and normalized labor relations through institutional channels – an accommodative post-wave context that removed the adversarial pressure that had kept networks operationally live through the austerity decade. Whether TUC infrastructure maintains its adversarial operational character under a sympathetic government, or whether accommodation produces the institutionally-channeled latency that the BC NDP produced for British Columbia's labor movement, is a question the UK's post-wave trajectory will answer over the coming years. The US wave moderated in 2024, and the political environment shifted substantially with the return of a Trump administration whose hostility to organized labor substantially exceeds that of any prior administration in the study's evidence window – a condition that could function as a new activating pressure or, depending on the severity and form of attack, as a demobilizing one. Quebec faces the most deliberate post-wave state intervention: Bill 89's attempt to foreclose the legal conditions under which the Common Front infrastructure produces binding outcomes is an attempt to convert banked capacity into lapsed capacity on a legislatively compressed timeline. These three trajectories – accommodation, hostile pressure, legal dismantling – are the post-wave conditions that a follow-on comparative study should track systematically.

- Subnational extension to other federal LMEs. The within-Canada design demonstrated that subnational comparisons in federal systems can hold IV1 effectively constant by institutional design, isolating IV2 variation against a background of eliminated confounders. The United States is the most immediate candidate for extension.

State-level variation in right-to-work coverage, public sector bargaining rights, essential services designations, and the political environment facing labor movements produces genuine institutional variation across states that share the same federal macroeconomic conditions, the same federal pandemic support timeline, and the same LME heritage. The framework would ask whether state-level coordination network activation status – coded through the same three-condition test applied in this study – explains the geographic concentration of the post-pandemic wave that aggregate national statistics obscure. Cornell ILR's Labor Action Tracker provides the data infrastructure for a state-level DV operationalization; the methodological challenge is IV2 coding at the state level, where contemporaneous documentation of cross-sector coordination activity is less systematically archived than at the national or provincial level. Australia's state-level variation in industrial relations jurisdiction for certain sectors, and Germany's Länder-level variation in the implementation of sectoral agreements, offer parallel opportunities with different institutional configurations.

- Reactive activation and post-shock network construction. The November 2022 Ontario episode documents a mechanism the framework does not currently model: the reactive construction of labor movement-wide coordination in direct response to the sectorally bounded character of post-shock mobilization. The framework predicts that latent cases will produce sectorally bounded responses; it does not predict the conditions under which those sectorally bounded responses themselves generate sufficient political pressure to produce cross-sector solidarity construction during the post-pandemic period. Ontario's November 2022 cross-sector general strike commitments were assembled not

from pre-existing activated networks but from the intensity of a specific political provocation – the Ford government's invocation of the notwithstanding clause to suppress one sector's bargaining rights. That this episode produced genuine labor movement-wide coordination without pre-pandemic activation, and that the coordination dissolved when the provocation was removed rather than consolidating into a durable network, raises questions about the conditions under which reactive activation converts to sustained activation. How severe does a political provocation need to be? What organizational forms does reactive activation produce, and are those forms capable of consolidating into the kind of durable infrastructure that pre-pandemic activation provides? Ontario 2022 is a case study in reactive activation that failed to consolidate. Identifying what conditions would have allowed it to consolidate – or whether the same provocation in a different pre-pandemic organizational environment would have produced a different trajectory – is a research question the framework opens without answering.

- Employer coordination as a forcing mechanism. The US activation pathway is distinctive in being driven partly through a specific organizational forcing mechanism: nationally coordinated employer opposition at Amazon, Walmart, McDonald's, and Starbucks, whose centralized anti-union strategies operated across local and sectoral boundaries and made piecemeal single-union responses inadequate. The dissertation treats this as the historical explanation for why US activation ran through extra-institutional horizontal networks rather than formal peak-body machinery – the forcing mechanism determined the channel of the response – but it does not develop the

relationship between employer coordination and labor counter-coordination into a systematic theoretical account. That account matters for prediction: if employer coordination is a forcing mechanism for labor activation, then periods of intensifying employer coordination should predict periods of reactive labor counter-activation, the character of employer coordination should shape the character of the labor response it forces into existence, and labor movements facing nationally centralized employer strategies should be pushed toward the kind of extra-institutional cross-sector solidarity that institutionally coordinated employer strategies do not generate equivalently. Amazon's expansion into the UK, Ireland, and Germany brought the same centralized anti-union approach into institutional environments with different legal frameworks and organizational histories, producing distinct counter-coordination dynamics in each setting. A systematic comparative analysis of employer coordination strategies and labor movement organizational responses – treating employer coordination as a variable that conditions the type of labor activation that is organizationally compelled – would extend the activation sequencing account into the organizational ecology in which labor movements operate, rather than treating the forces that produce activation as an exogenous historical given.

Broader Significance

This dissertation has argued that the distribution of post-pandemic strike waves across liberal market economies is explained by a conjunctural logic: economically premature rollback of pandemic-era income supports met labor movement coordination networks that were already operationally exercised for cross-sector mobilization before

the shock arrived. Where both conditions were present, waves occurred – through institutionally distinct but functionally equivalent activation pathways in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Quebec. Where either condition was absent, waves did not occur: not because workers lacked grievance, as Ontario, British Columbia, and Ireland each demonstrate, and not because labor movements lacked organizational capacity, as Australia and New Zealand demonstrate, but because the conjunction failed. The theoretical contribution is the specification of that conjunction and the variable that controls it: not how much coordination capacity a labor movement possesses, but whether that capacity was activated – operationally exercised, not merely structurally present – at the moment the shock arrived. The sequencing is the mechanism. Everything else follows from it.

The historical stakes of getting this right extend beyond the comparative literature. The post-pandemic strike waves this dissertation has analyzed were the most consequential episodes of labor mobilization in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Quebec in a generation – not as individually remarkable disputes, but as sustained, multidimensional escalations that reshaped pay structures, altered public understandings of collective action in LME settings, and produced institutional outcomes that the preceding decade's conventional wisdom about organized labor's trajectory would not have predicted. In the US, 2023 produced more total strike time than the entire preceding decade combined, including the first simultaneous strike against all three major Detroit automakers since 1976 and the first simultaneous walkout by both Hollywood guilds since 1960. In the UK, the 2022-23 wave brought approximately 500,000 workers out on

a single day in February 2023 – the largest coordinated public sector action since 1926 – and sustained disruption across transport, education, and healthcare at a level not seen since the late 1980s. In Quebec, the 2023 Common Front mobilization of 420,000 workers broke every prior record in the province's industrial history. These were not noise in a declining trend. They were signal. Understanding what produced them – and what prevented equivalent outcomes in six otherwise comparable political economies – is not merely a retrospective scholarly exercise. It is preparation for the next time conditions align.

The framework offers a way of reading the present by asking: is this labor movement's coordination infrastructure live right now? That question has a specific, documentable, time-bounded answer in any given period, and that answer determines whether the next shared shock – an inflationary episode, a legislative attack, a pandemic – finds the labor movement positioned to convert grievance into synchronized collective action, or confined to isolated sectoral responses that resolve quietly within institutional channels.

The post-pandemic period showed what it looks like when coordination is live at the moment it is needed. Quebec's Bill 89, New Zealand's FPA repeal, and the sustained federal back-to-work interventions in Canada's federally regulated sectors show that state actors have drawn the same inference from the same evidence and are acting on it. Labor movement coordination is not a fixed structural endowment. It is a historical achievement – built through deliberate organizational choices, maintained through sustained exercise, banked through institutionally channeled practice, and dismantled through equally

deliberate political decisions. The period we have now entered will show whether the movements that produced the post-pandemic waves understood not just what factors made those waves possible, but also what future contingencies those waves have made possible.

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