

THE SPLIT IN THE AFL-CIO: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CANADIAN LABOUR
MOVEMENT

THE SPLIT IN THE AFL-CIO: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CANADIAN LABOUR
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By

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ABSTRACT

In July 2005, six unions withdrew from the central labour federation in the United States, the AFL-CIO. In September 2005, joined by a seventh union, the disaffiliated unions formed a rival labour federation called Change to Win (CTW).

On the surface according to Stern, leader of the CTW coalition, what divides the two sides of the split is a disagreement over whether or not to place greater emphasis on organizing new members or altering the political climate in the US in order to facilitate organizing.

This thesis explores some of the earlier debates within the union renewal literature in the US and in Canada and exposes many of the similarities between the 1995 “New Voices” leadership of the AFL-CIO and the CTW leadership. Through a description and analysis of the events that led to the split in the AFL-CIO, the limitations of the debates that led to the split are revealed and the strategies for union renewal advanced by the proponents of CTW are critiqued. Drawing on interviews with elected leaders and staff from some of the Canadian sections of the CTW unions, one of the largest Canadian unions, the Ontario Federation of Labour and the Canadian Labour Congress, this thesis examines some of the implications of the split in the AFL-CIO on the Canadian labour movement. As trade unionists in Canada consider different approaches to union renewal, one option is to embrace an approach similar to the CTW approach: greater cooperation with employers and a more “efficient” business unionism. Another approach is union renewal with a socialist character; developing working-class capacities to construct socialist alternatives and renew the labour movement as an instrument of working-class struggle.

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Introduction

In the summer of 2005, six unions, including the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW), International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT), Labourers, United Farm Workers (UFW) and the recently merged Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE) and Hotel and Restaurant Employees International Union (HERE), withdrew from the central labour federation in the United States, the AFL-CIO. In September 2005, the seven unions, having been joined by the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America (UBC) union which had left the AFL-CIO earlier in 2001, formed a rival labour federation called Change to Win (CTW). The AFL-CIO convention that summer marked the fiftieth anniversary of the merger of the AFL and CIO and a split in the labour movement.

In a flurry of press conferences and online blog entries in the months leading up to the split, Andy Stern, leader of the split and the President of SEIU, the largest union in the US, admonished the AFL-CIO leadership for having failed to reverse the long decline in union density in the US. On the surface according to Stern, what divides the two sides of the split is a disagreement over whether or not to place greater emphasis on organizing new members or altering the political climate in the US in order to facilitate organizing. The CTW unions boasted that they would devote more resources to aggressive campaigns to organize new members and accomplish what the AFL-CIO under Sweeney's "New Voices" leadership had promised to do when it was elected ten years earlier. Prior to leaving the AFL-CIO, the CTW unions proposed a series of structural reforms, most of which would have given greater authority to the AFL-CIO to force mergers between unions and make more "efficient" use of resources through per capita dues rebates to "organizing unions", such as the SEIU.

In various interviews with reporters and in his recently published book "A Country That Works: Getting America Back on Track", Andy Stern outlines his vision for a revitalized US labour movement. Stern's vision includes labour-management partnerships, big unions (i.e. large numbers and few locals) and union renewal "from above". In an interview with CNBC-TV, reported in the *Nation*, Stern revealed who he believes to be labour's allies: "our labor movement was built around an industrial economy back in the 1930s. It was sort of class struggle unionism, but workers in today's economy are not looking for unions to cause problems; they're looking for them to solve them, and this means like Ireland where business and labor and government all began to work together, we need team America to really work together" (Wypijewski, 2005). Stern, also quoted in the media as having said "the good news is, communism is dead", is an anti-communist, pro-capitalist labour leader well-known for advocating union partnerships with employers to "help make America 'competitive'" and has been dubbed, at least among the US corporate media, as the "most important labor boss in America" (Moody, 1998; Stahl, 2006).

In Canada, there has not been much attention paid to the split, despite the fact that a fifth of union members in Canada belong to the Canadian sections of the CTW unions. In the months prior to the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) convention and the split in the AFL-CIO, Geoff Bickerton, labour commentator for the popular Left magazine *Canadian Dimension* was among the few to report on the split, applauded the labour movement in the US for having been “more capable than we are [in Canada] when it comes to seriously examining our shortcomings and debating meaningful and radical solutions” (Bickerton, 2005). Bickerton praised the CTW unions for having engaged in “a serious debate about the changes necessary to revitalize the movement” and urged labour activists in Canada to learn from the kinds of union renewal solutions being explored south of the border in debates surrounding the split. But did the US labour movement, as Bickerton has argued, really debate radical solutions? Should we take inspiration from CTW as an example of progressive union renewal?

Despite the fact that the split has not garnered much attention within the Canadian labour movement, we would be wise to pay attention. The existence of increasingly high levels of integration in production and labour markets between Canada and the US invariably means that the extent to which workers in the US succeed in mounting an effective resistance to attacks on their organizations will impact upon the capacity of Canadian workers to resist similar attacks. Concessionary bargaining, for example, facilitates a race to the bottom. The Canadian split from the UAW signified Canadian workers’ refusal to accept concessions from the Big Three automakers and that Canadian unions could chart new directions on their own. Furthermore, the presence of international unions and cross-border exchanges between trade unionists about union renewal strategies means that trade unionists in Canada will undoubtedly glance south of the border at various points and evaluate debates and experiments with union renewal in the US as we contemplate our own directions.

Any comparative analysis must first acknowledge that the Canadian labour movement is in a crisis of its own. Union density in the private sector in Canada has fallen from 30% in 1981 to under 20% today (Jackson, 2006). And while it would be difficult to argue that the Canadian labour movement is lacking in opportunities for union renewal (Yates, forthcoming), it is sorely lacking in its capacity to mount an effective challenge to neoliberalism. In the context of declining union density and political influence, what lessons can trade unionists in Canada take from the recent split in the AFL-CIO about union renewal?

On the surface, the split in the US was over different approaches to union renewal. Neither side of the split, I will argue, offers a progressive approach to union renewal. The extent to which the US labour movement engaged in a serious debate about union renewal prior to the split, never mind a debate about radical union renewal solutions, is in and of itself, a matter of some debate. At no point did the debate reach beyond the upper echelons of the trade union leadership to engage rank-and-file members, never mind the vast majority of workers in the US who don’t belong to unions. Most of the debate took place inside closed union

boardrooms, online, and in article exchanges published in the US corporate media. I will argue that the lessons to be drawn from the split therefore, are lessons about what not to do.

This thesis relies on interviews conducted with elected Canadian labour leaders and staff spokespeople, including Bill Hume, Director of Organizing for SEIU Local 1, the largest SEIU local in Canada, Bob Linton, National Coordinator for Communications and Government and Foreign Affairs for UFCW, Alex Dagg, International Executive Vice-President of UNITE-HERE, Robert Bouvier, President of Teamsters Canada, Buzz Hargrove, President of the CAW, Wayne Samuelson, President of the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) and Hassan Yussuff, Secretary-Treasurer of the CLC.

The interviews reveal that the Canadian leaders of the CTW unions are enthusiastic about CTW, interested in exploring the applicability of the CTW proposals within the Canadian context and optimistic that the split will lead to a revitalization of the US labour movement. The other labour leaders I interviewed, including Hargrove, Samuelson and Yussuff, are far more skeptical about CTW and its relevance to the Canadian labour movement.

In recent years, some of the Canadian sections of the CTW unions, notably UFCW, SEIU and UNITE-HERE, have generated a certain amount of interest among progressive trade unionists in recent years, in large part because of their focus on organizing unorganized workers in sectors dominated by workers who have traditionally been underrepresented and marginalized in the labour movement, namely racialized workers and low-income immigrant workers, especially women. Popular organizing campaigns like the UNITE-HERE Hotel Workers Rising campaign and the SEIU's Justice for Janitors campaign have peaked the interest of those of us who have wished for a long time that the labour movement would prioritize organizing unorganized workers and put immigrant workers, racialized workers and women front and center in a project to rebuild. There is reason to be a bit more cautious about the CTW unions in Canada however, since these unions certainly have more in common with their US counterparts than a commitment to organizing. The CTW unions in Canada and their US counterparts also share much in the way of their union culture and their approach to politics.

Neither side of the split has stopped to question the ideological premises of trade unionism in the US and suggested a break from the dominant culture of business unionism in the US (Fletcher, 2005). The CTW federation, with its emphasis on strategic political alliances with both the Republicans and the Democrats and rejection of adversarial class struggle unionism in favour of partnerships with corporate America, arguably represents an even more "efficient" version of the same old business unionism. Neither side of the split has proposed a break with the two capitalist parties in the US or ever imagined itself as anything other than a junior partner to capital let alone an independent working-class movement. This observation informs one of the central themes of this thesis.

To determine what it will take to renew the labour movement in Canada, we will need to engage more than the trade union leadership in a debate about new directions. We will need to engage rank-and-file members at the base in a movement-wide debate that asks: what are the roots of the crisis in the labour movement? What kind of unions and what kind of labour movement are we trying to build? What are the limitations of union renewal charted “from above”? This debate should also reach beyond the trade union membership to build genuine relationships with non-union workers, social movements and the Left, such as it is. The challenge is to cast our imagination beyond the kinds of solutions that have been raised by the CTW unions. Ultimately, we should go in the opposite direction of the terms of the debate that just took place in the US. We might also dare to reject the inevitability of capitalism and begin to imagine union renewal with a socialist character, how to revitalize an independent working-class movement and the steps it will take to get there.

The first part of this paper will explore some of the earlier debates within the union renewal literature in the US and in Canada in order to establish the context for the recent split in the US labour movement. In the early 1990s, trade unionists and academics engaged in a debate in the US that juxtaposed a “servicing” model of unionism with an “organizing” model. In 1995, John Sweeney, President of SEIU and the leader of the “New Voices” reform slate was elected to the AFL-CIO leadership, the first contested leadership race in the AFL-CIO’s history, on a promise to organize unorganized workers and revitalize the labour movement. Then, just as with the recent split, the US labour movement was engaged in a debate over the future direction of the labour movement and split into two camps characterized more by differences in relative emphasis than ideology and strategy.

The second part of this paper will explore the events that led to the split in the AFL-CIO, beginning with the informal discussions in 2001 that led to the birth of the New Unity Partnership. I will briefly explore some of the possible explanations for why the split occurred in the first place and suggest that the split was more about a strategic business union response to globalization and crisis in capitalism and Stern’s business/management approach to union leadership than it was about ideological differences. The NUP proposals will also be explored in more depth, including the proposals around restructuring the labour movement through forced mergers, organizing in “core jurisdictions” as an alternative to general unionism, and dues rebates for “organizing unions”.

The last part of the paper will explore some of the reactions among Canadian labour leaders to the split, drawing on material gathered from the interviews. Among the leaders of the CTW unions in Canada, there is a sense of optimism about the potential for union renewal in the US labour movement as a result of the founding of the CTW federation. There is also general support for transferring the CTW ideas to Canada. However support for the CTW initiatives is far from unanimous in Canada. Interviews conducted with non-CTW union leaders signal that there are reservations about CTW. The limited scope of the

union renewal debate in the US adds urgency to the project of building democratic unions and socialist political alternatives that go beyond a more efficient form of business unionism, as CTW would have it.

Methodology

The research for this paper is based on a systematic literature review of secondary sources, documentary analysis and interviews conducted between May 2006 and December 2006. This research has provided the basis for making a set of preliminary observations about the potential impact of the split in the AFL-CIO to date on the Canadian labour movement and on the Canadian sections of the CTW unions in particular. At the time of writing, it has been two years since the split in the AFL-CIO. As a result it is too early to be able to gather the relevant statistical data in order to draw more definitive conclusions about the implications of the split in either the US or in Canada, either in terms of the impact on overall union density and membership decline, political election results, individual union membership decline or renewal, etc. Because of this lack of available data, the observations made in this paper revolve centrally around an analysis of the debates among the various leaders at the center of the split and findings gathered through interviews with Canadian labour leaders about the kinds of lessons they are drawing from the split and their initial impressions.

Literature review

The literature reviewed in this paper is of two sorts. The first looks at the academic literature on union renewal in Canada to provide a bit of a broader context for the current debates about union renewal surrounding the split in the AFL-CIO. In particular, I do a comparative review of the “servicing model” vs “organizing model” debate as it emerged first in the US and later in Canada where there occurred debates about the feasibility of transferring the organizing model north of the border. This analysis, drawing upon Kate Bronfenbrenner’s study of organizing tactics as a pivotal contribution to the union renewal literature, Yates’ similar study of union organizing tactics in Ontario and British Columbia, Fairbrother and Yates’ comparative work on union renewal and Kumar and Schenk’s recent book on union renewal in Canada. I briefly explore two main alternatives to the organizing model, taking a more in depth look at social movement unionism and a cursory glance at some of the debates related to Paul Jarley’s “social-capital unionism” approach. The second literature reviewed in this paper focuses on the historical events and competing visions that led to the split in the AFL-CIO and the formation of the CTW. This draws predominantly on press releases, position papers and analysis issued by both sides of the split, and journalistic articles in both the US and Canadian press.

Interviews

The interviews conducted for this paper took place between May 2006 and December 2006. The interviews are used to explore the impact of the split on the Canadian labour movement and as such, those who were interviewed were either elected leaders of the labour movement in Canada or union staff. At the outset, I sought in particular to interview the leaders of the Canadian sections of the CTW unions in order to limit the scope of the research to the impact of the split on the

Canadian sections of CTW unions. Of the seven CTW unions with members in Canada, I interviewed leaders from five of the CTW unions. Though I attempted to contact the leaders of the remaining two CTW unions, they were unable to find time in their schedules to meet with me. I also interviewed the Secretary-Treasurer of the CLC, the President of the OFL and the President of the CAW in an effort to draw some broader conclusions about the impact of the split on the Canadian labour movement as a whole.

The interviews focused on questions about the issues and events that led to the split, the specific New Unity Partnership proposals, and questions about whether or not the split would impact unions in Canada. I asked the labour leaders of the Canadian sections of the CTW unions about their participation in the decisions leading up to the split or CTW events (conferences, founding convention, organizing campaigns, etc) following the split. I explored the extent to which discussions about the CTW had occurred within unions, between unions, and within the Ontario Labour Federation and Canadian Labour Congress and the substance and anticipated outcomes of these discussions on individual union strategic directions, rank-and-file members, relationships between unions, etc.

Of course in limiting my interviews to leadership and staff, my findings are incomplete. Despite the fact that the debate leading up to the split was concentrated among leaders and staff, the impact, if there is one, will undoubtedly be experienced not just by the leadership but also by rank-and-file union members. Further exploration of this topic would benefit from interviews with union members across the labour movement. However, because of the hugely instrumental role staff and leadership play in the overall strategic direction of unions, at times to the great detriment of democratic rank-and-file participation and leadership, the information gathered in these interviews has proved to be valuable and revealing.

Union Renewal in Canada and the US

Unions in decline

The term “union renewal” describes the process of unions rebuilding and re-inventing themselves in the context of a capital driven offensive on workers and their unions, illustrated by declines both in union density and organized labour’s influence. When economic stagnation struck the advanced capitalist countries beginning in the early 1970s following a period of rapid economic growth after the Second World War, capital sought to recuperate profit levels by cutting labour costs (Gapasin and Yates, 2005). Workers have been faced with an onslaught of neoliberal labour market and welfare state restructuring designed to remove barriers to capital’s search for profit. Under capitalism it is “logical” to argue that unions stand in the way of market forces.

Employers and governments have collaboratively exercised coercive measures to restrict organized labour’s bargaining power. Within the Canadian state for example, the incidences of ad hoc back-to-work legislation have risen dramatically, from six instances of back-to-work legislation between 1950 and 1965 and fifty-one instances of back-to-work legislation in the following fifteen years (Panitch and Swartz, 2003). Capital’s push to enhance profits through coercive labour flexibilization and labour market deregulation strategies combined with neoliberal welfare state restructuring has had significant direct impacts on workplaces and jobs, the result of which has been an overall decline in union density and deterioration in standards of living for many workers, which has been particularly severe in the private sector.

Union density in the US has been declining since it reached its peak of 31.8% in the late 1940s and has since dropped to less than 13% overall and about 9% in the private sector (Milkman, 2005; Crow and Albo, 2005). In Canada, union density has dropped from 37.2% in 1984 to just above 30% today (Jackson, 2006; Crow and Albo, 2005). Union density in the private sector has fallen from 30% in 1981 to under 20% today (Jackson, 2006). In comparing itself to the US labour movement, the Canadian labour movement has often found a comforting but false sense of security in its relatively stable union density levels. Union density levels in Canada only look better as compared with the US.

Canada’s relatively stable union density is reliant on the relatively high level of union density in the public sector and higher levels of union density in the public sector have often masked the crisis in union density in the Canadian labour movement. In both Canada and the US, the historical strength of the labour movement has been the white male industrial working-class. Traditional areas of union strength, such as the manufacturing sector, have been particularly hard hit by labour market restructuring and the increased globalization of production. In the US for example, in the eight industries with the greatest job losses, including the steel and auto industries, about 80% of the 2.1 million jobs lost belonged to union members (Rose and Chaison, 2001). Unions, for their part, have not done a good job of recuperating numbers through organizing the non-union manufacturing workplaces in either Canada or the US.

Union density, of course, is not the only measure of organized labour's strength, though it is a significant factor. Within the numbers of workers who belong to unions, there are an even smaller percentage of workers who are collectively organized to resist attacks, to defend working-class interests and to go even further to demand concessions from employers. Capital has done a good job of convincing workers that the competitive pressures of "globalization" are inevitable and that the working-class and its unions must adapt in order to survive in the "new economy". Thus there is a sense of demoralization and defeat that rests heavily on the shoulders of workers and in spite of some inspiring examples of workers' struggles, there is little evidence that the union movement has been capable of developing and inspiring an organized response to neoliberalism and its impacts on workers and their unions.

Union renewal

New instabilities and obstacles for workers also raise new possibilities for struggle. Whereas unions have often clung to existing institutions and practices with the hope that conditions would improve, the union renewal literature that has exploded in recent years explores how in the context of sustained attacks on workers and demobilized, weak unions, what unions do to renew themselves matters. The strength of the union renewal literature is the important consideration it gives to the agency of workers and their organizations in affecting the future. The union renewal literature explores various struggles between labour, employers and governments and evaluates the strengths and weakness of various union strategies and the impact upon union memberships, while drawing comparisons between union experiments in a variety of contexts (Yates, 2000). Unions are viewed as strategic actors who, despite the structural factors and unequal power relations that constrain unions, have a certain amount of control over their future. Whereas there exists other bodies of literature that are focused on unpacking the structural determinants of organized labour's decline, the union renewal literature wrestles with the question of what unions can do to respond and rebuild.

The "organizing model" versus the "servicing model"

The "union renewal" literature exploded in the late 1980s in the US following years of decline in the US labour movement. Unions like UNITE-HERE, SEIU and UFCW were experimenting with a new model of unionism, prompting a debate among trade union leaderships and progressive academics that contrasted the new "organizing model" with the old "servicing model". The roots of what came to be known as the servicing model can arguably be found in the process of institutionalization of the labour movement through the post-war "Wagner" industrial relations model that was introduced in the 1930s and 1940s first in the US and later in Canada. Postwar industrial relations policies legalized collective bargaining relationships and introduced labour boards to regulate the

collective bargaining process. Arguably this had a fundamentally demobilizing impact on the labour movement, transforming “rank and file” mass unionism into a more formal, professionalized, collective bargaining process and producing a more centralized, bureaucratic and “legalistic” unionism. The “Wagner” industrial relations model fundamentally altered the relationships between union leaders and members. In stark contrast to the earlier period of growth in the labour movement that had witnessed union victories won through direct actions (sit-down strikes, plant occupations, work-to-rule, etc), the institutionalization of the labour movement through the Wagner industrial relations regime meant that union members now had workplace problems solved for them by professional union leaders and union staff through grievance processes and arbitration procedures.

Critics of the servicing model have argued that when members have problems solved for them, information and expertise is contained among professional union representatives who essentially act as “gatekeepers”. Within the servicing model, shop floor agitators have been replaced by union representatives whose role it is to act as “insurance agents” effectively charged with administering an “insurance policy”, i.e. the union (Jarley, 2004). Membership apathy and overdependence on staff to solve problems are among some of the negative outcomes that have been attributed to the servicing model.

The organizing model, in contrast, emphasized organizing unorganized workers, direct-action mobilization tactics and active rank-and-file participation. The organizing model discouraged members from seeing themselves as passive consumers of union services and encouraged workers to see themselves as needing to become directly involved and participate in their unions as part of a long-term project of rebuilding union memberships. Successful union victories with the organizing model, including the well-known SEIU Justice for Janitors campaign which led to the organization of tens of thousands of low-wage building services workers and the successful HERE campaign to organize Las Vegas casino workers, were among the inspiring examples of “organizing unions”. Two books, *Organizing to Win: New Research on Union Strategies*, edited by Kate Bronfenbrenner et al (1998) and *Rebuilding Labor: Organizing and Organizers in the New Union Movement* edited by Ruth Milkman and Kim Voss (2004) are central to the union renewal literature in documenting union efforts to implement the organizing model.

Bronfenbrenner’s pioneering study of private-sector NLRB certification election results and first contract campaigns, conducted between 1986 and 1987 and then again in 1994, studied the positive impacts of the organizing model, also known as the “comprehensive union building strategy” (1998). Bronfenbrenner’s study revealed that when union strategies are taken into account in certification elections along with the organizing climate, bargaining unit demographics and employer tactics, union strategies were found to play a greater role in explaining election outcomes than any other group of variables (Bronfenbrenner et al, 1998). Bronfenbrenner found that unions were more successful in certification elections when they used a combination of “rank and file intensive” tactics, including one-

on-one contact, housecalls, small group meetings, committees and other “grassroots” tactics. Bronfenbrenner argued that one of the long-term benefits of this “grassroots” model of unionism was that it would generate an “army” of organizers and thus a tremendous capacity for unions to organize unorganized workers (1998).

Ruth Milkman and Kim Voss’ research explored some of the challenges and pre-conditions of transformation from the servicing model to the organizing model. Milkman and Voss’ argue that three factors were necessary for the transformation to occur. First, the transformation process was typically orchestrated from the top; “contrary to the rather romantic view that only the rank and file can be the fountain of democratic change” (Milkman and Voss, 2004). Their studies showed that rank and file members and staff were often resistant to change and not likely to be the conduits of a new model. Second, locals that have transformed had sustained an internal political crisis that had resulted in a change of leadership, the new leaders having brought previous activist and social movement experience and a strategic vision of the tactics required to change (Voss and Sherman, 1998). Third, the transformation from a servicing to an organizing model required centralized pressure from above. With members and staff “from below” resistant to change, international unions had facilitated the transformation process through local trusteeships and other imposed structural changes from above.

In 1995, John Sweeney’s “New Voices” slate was elected to the leadership of the AFL-CIO on a promise to shift more resources into organizing unorganized workers. Sweeney, it was argued, would facilitate the transformation process from above just as he had done with the SEIU and the Justice for Janitors campaign. With rhetoric that now sounds reminiscent of the recent split in the AFL-CIO, Sweeney declared that the labour movement was in crisis because affiliates were not organizing at the pace that was needed to reverse the decline and that the AFL-CIO under his leadership would turn this around (Bensinger, 1998). In 1998, the AFL-CIO “New Voices” leadership published an internal manual called “Numbers That Count” which promoted the organizing model as a model that would involve more members in rebuilding the labour movement (Fletcher and Hurd, 1998). Under Sweeney’s leadership, the AFL-CIO expanded its Organizing Institute, launched “Union Summer”, a summer organizing training for college students and encouraged affiliates to follow the HERE and SEIU example and devote more resources to organizing. Then, just as with the more recent birth of the CTW federation, there were progressive trade unionists and pioneers of the union renewal literature in the US that were optimistic that the new AFL-CIO leadership would be able to reverse the decline in the US labour movement. The “New Voices” leadership was seen as having the potential to encourage a movement wide transformation process from the servicing model to the organizing model. Under the “New Voices” regime however, union density in the US continued to decline. Many of the progressive academics such as Ruth Milkman and Kate Bronfenbrenner and arguably progressive trade unionists

within some of the “organizing unions” who were optimistic about the “New Voices” leadership are now optimistic about CTW.

Social movement unionism in the US

In the US, the organizing model has often been equated with “social movement unionism” and been posited as an alternative to business unionism. Voss and Sherman, for example, have argued that social movement unionism rejects business unionism “with its emphasis on servicing current union members and partnership with employers” (2003). Organizing unions like SEIU, UFCW and UNITE-HERE in the US, have been credited with having set an example of such an alternative through their commitment to organizing unorganized workers, immigrant, racialized and low-wage women workers in particular, and use of direct-action tactics and grassroots rank-and-file participation. In essence, this is an example of the comprehensive union building strategy that is a focus of Bronfenbrenner’s research. The extent to which the organizing model, often referred to as “social movement unionism” in the US, represents an alternative to business unionism however, is a matter of debate. More accurately perhaps, the organizing model, represents a more “dynamic” model of business unionism than it does an alternative or significant departure from business unionism. Organizing unorganized workers in the service sector through the use of a variety of intensive and aggressive organizing tactics and corporate campaign strategies, does not automatically indicate a new culture of unionism.

Proponents of the organizing model, while having correctly identified important limitations of the servicing model, have not acknowledged that the roots of the crisis in the US labour movement, and the roots of the servicing model, reach deep into the historical struggle between class forces in the US and did not begin and will not end, with a change in union leadership or with a change in union tactics. Arguably, both the organizing and servicing models are different variants of business unionism. The business unionism of Samuel Gompers during the first decades of the twentieth century remains the dominant vision of the labour movement. This vision of the labour movement is characterized by a narrow focus “bread-and-butter” interests of union members, along with an acceptance that the two political “choices” offered by the capitalist parties in the US is sufficient, a basic assumption that capitalism is inevitable and that capital is entitled to more share of the pie (Eisenscher, 2002). None of the organizing unions, including UFCW, SEIU and UNITE-HERE, have proposed a break from the two capitalist parties in the US or a vision that proposes rebuilding an independent radical left and an alternative to capitalism.

The SEIU’s labour-management cooperation strategies to organize workers in the US, provides an illustration. A recent article in the SF Weekly, among others, exposed the secret deals worked out between SEIU union leaders and retirement nursing home owners where SEIU agreed to use its lobbying power with Democratic legislators in Sacramento to help nursing home owners pass a 2004 bill that would increase MediCal subsidies to nursing homes, to pass

tort reform legislation to limit patients' right to sue in the event of abuse, and to oppose efforts by patient advocates to push for legislation that would require nursing homes to increase staff to patient ratios (Smith, 2007). In return, the nursing home owners agreed to permit the SEIU to recruit nursing home workers into their union under "template agreements" that would specify that the union "is not allowed to report health care violations to state regulators" and that unionized workers are prohibited "from picketing and negotiating improvements in health care or other benefits" (Smith, 2007). The recent SEIU example that was exposed in SF Weekly is but one example in the US where an "organizing union" has collaborated with either Democrats or Republicans and with employers to unionize workers, often negotiating the "sweetheart" deals behind closed doors unbeknownst to workers. The organizing model in and of itself, and the organizing unions that have endeavored to transform the labour movement through its implementation, though in many ways a more dynamic model of unionism than the servicing model, does not pose a fundamental challenge to the assumptions of business unionism.

The organizing model and social movement unionism in Canada

As labour movements outside of the US have experienced decline and as experiments with union renewal have been documented, trade unionists have looked across movements for ideas and examples of effective union revitalization strategies. International unions brought experiences with the organizing model to Canada, though attempts to transfer the model were never all that successful (Fairbrother and Yates, 2003). Relatively stable union density in Canada, as compared with the US, has kept unions in Canada feeling relatively secure in their memberships and thus has perhaps inspired fewer stark crises, or other impetus to experiment with new models and tactics of organizing workers.

Though unions like the CAW, for example, have experienced significant attacks on their memberships in the context of labour market restructuring from manufacturing to services, they have also been able to organize unorganized workers sometimes on reputation alone, and not felt the pressure to adopt a new organizing model. The Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) is another example. CUPE has not sought to implement a coordinated organizing program, but this is perhaps because the union has continued to see its union membership grow, in spite of neoliberal welfare state and labour market restructuring that has led to an overall decline in union density. Unions in Canada, as in the US, have also been focused on defending existing union memberships in the face of attacks and attempts on the part of employers to win concessions from workers. With few inspiring exceptions, unions have often been unwilling to acknowledge the depth of the crisis in the labour movement and instead have retreated to a position of defensiveness at best. Canadian unions have been more reluctant than some of the international unions to embrace organizing at the expense of servicing existing union members, arguing that servicing is an important part of ensuring that union

memberships are stable, satisfied and thus committed to defend their unions (Fairbrother and Yates, 2003).

The fact that the central labour federation in Canada does not hold the same centralized responsibility for organizing as does the AFL-CIO has been another factor that has influenced the lack of a movement-wide debate about approaches to organizing strategies in Canada. Whereas in the US, organizing unions sought to elect a national union leadership that would promote the organizing model, in Canada the responsibility for organizing rests with the affiliates. The promotion of the organizing model in the US by the AFL-CIO and some of the affiliates combined with research by Bronfenbrenner and others "had a catalytic effect on debates over the future of unions" in the US (Fairbrother and Yates, 2003).

In Canada, the question of organizing has been a debate within unions more than it has been a debate between unions or at the national level. In Canada, "political-ideological debates and splits with the labour movement which [have] pitted more militant nationalist and public sector unions against American-based international unions" have also resulted in a certain rejection of the organizing model (Fairbrother and Yates, 2003). The history of struggle in the Canadian labour movement to establish independent Canadian unions has meant that industrial unions have been skeptical about the transferability of the US organizing model to Canada and reluctant to import ideas from the US. The dominant presence of Canadian unions, with their historical commitment to social unionism and ties to social democratic politics, has meant that Canadian unions have been less convinced than have some international unions, that the organizing model presents the best alternative way forward.

Though the organizing model was never made popular in the Canadian labour movement as it was in the US, pioneers of the union renewal literature in Canada have also studied the impacts of organizing strategies and tactics on union memberships and the challenges of transforming union cultures. Yates' study of union certification drives between 1981 and 1999 in British Columbia and Ontario showed that the use of rank-and-file organizers increases union chances of success in organizing drives from 66% to 78% and the use of an inside committee increases the chances of success from 62% to 71% (Yates, 2000). Yates' conclusion is similar to Bronfenbrenner's: union resources must be combined with effective union strategies to achieve results in union membership growth (2000).

Some critics of the organizing model in Canada have proposed social movement unionism as an alternative to both the servicing model and the organizing model. Chris Schenk, Research Director of the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL), among others, has expressed concerns that the organizing model itself "will become utilitarian rather than a genuine step toward a culture of solidarity" (2003). In Canada, social movement unionism arguably means something different than it does in the US labour movement, though certainly there are different definitions of social movement unionism among its proponents.

Schenk, for example, argues that there are two main factors that distinguish social movement unionism from the organizing model. Social movement unionism, he argues, is not just about transforming unions, it is also about transforming society, which involves democratizing unions, thus empowering workers, and maintaining a commitment to an alternative ideological vision and wider social agenda for change (Schenk, 2003). Social movement unionism, he argues, goes beyond the union as an institution to encompass "a vision that extends beyond a particular workplace to the labour movement and society as a whole" (Schenk, 2003).

Central to the project of democratizing unions is the idea that it is not sufficient to transform organizing, we must also transform the organizational culture of unions themselves. The organizing model mobilizes rank-and-file participation in support of goals decided from above where members are mobilized for activities over which they have little or no control and rank and file activism is "turned on and off like a faucet" at the direction of union leaderships and staff (Eisenscher, 2002). Within the organizing model, workers are encouraged to participate in their unions but are not invited to participate in debates about union policies or union strategies. Workers in essence, may participate in their unions but do not control their unions. Stage-managed mobilization from the top, including rank-and-file participation in well-choreographed direct actions but with limited or no input from the bottom, "perpetuates an activist version of what has come to be known as service-model unionism (the contemporary expression of business unionism) rather than building democratic empowerment of union members" (Eisenscher, 2002). This is the model that has been popularized and admired for its militant tactics and rank-and-file participation even among activists on the Left within the labour movement.

Union democracy, in contrast, is a tool for building solidarity among workers, for deepening accountability between union leaderships and rank-and-file workers, and for collectively determining appropriate strategies through debate and struggle (Eisenscher, 2002). Through this process of collective struggle, workers develop the capacities to change themselves and develop the collective capacities to change society (Gindin, 1998).

The second factor that distinguishes social movement unionism from the organizing model is the goal of moving beyond the union as an institution to construct an alternative vision for society. But what is the alternative vision for society imagined in the social movement unionism alternative to business unionism? Within the union renewal literature in Canada, the references to an alternative vision for society among proponents of social movement unionism are more vague than precise. Social movement unionism is not necessarily much different from the culture of social unionism that has distinguished Canadian unions from their US counterparts; it is about unions taking a stand on important public-policy issues, i.e. taking a stand on public services, universal health care and childcare, public education. Social movement unionism describes a union movement opposed to all forms of oppression, including sexism, homophobia,

and other forms of prejudice. Social unions in Canada have long had an agenda that has combined collective bargaining goals with political action which has been traditionally channeled through the existence of the labour friendly NDP in English Canada, and sovereignist parties in Quebec. Industrial unions in Canada have advocated for workers as both wage earners and as citizens and have been active around issues such as unemployment assistance, health care, public education and public services (Kumar and Murray, 2006).

Social movement unionism then, is not necessarily about envisioning a political alternative to capitalist social relations. This is a major limitation of social movement unionism. It is not all together surprising that social movement unionism in Canada – with its commitment to social democratic politics – is the Left alternative within the union renewal literature. This speaks to the weakness of the socialist Left in Canada in general and the social democratic character of the union renewal literature itself. Within the union renewal literature, the crisis in labour is not explained in explicitly class terms as a result of an historical struggle between class forces. Rather the crisis is attributed to a struggle between unions, employers and governments and the focus is on what unions, as institutions, can do to renew, as opposed to what can be done to rebuild unions as instruments of the working-class in the context of a struggle between class forces. The correct formulation of the problem, however, to draw upon Marx, indicates the solution. If the crisis in labour were re-formulated in class terms, the alternative solutions put forward would undoubtedly be different.

Social-capital unionism

"Social-capital unionism" is another alternative to the organizing model that has been debated within the literature. In his 2004 article titled "Unions as Social Capital: Renewal through a Return to the Logic of Mutual Aid," Paul Jarley advocates a "social-capital unionism" approach as an alternative to both the servicing and organizing models. Social capital is defined as "the ability to use personal contacts to achieve objectives" and is explained as being derived from interpersonal networks (Jarley, 2004). The key question for social capital unionism has been posited as "how can unions leverage the social networks of members inside and outside the workplace to enhance the value of unions to members and workers generally?" (Jarley, 2004) Jarley argues that the organizing model is too "reactive" because it relies on conflict between workers and employers to sustain momentum (2004). The social-capital unionism approach, in contrast, "organizes around people, not issues" and seeks to identify those workers with the most contacts "so that the union organizer can get to know everyone in the workplace by regularly taking them all out for a few beers" (Jarley, 2004).

In the debate over social-capital unionism, some have defended the organizing model, arguing that it "organizes people around problems" whereas the

servicing model resolves issues and problems without the participation of people (Banks and Metzgar, 2005). Others have argued that social-capital unionism is a model which promotes labour-management cooperation (Clawson, 2005). The social capital approach rejects adversarial unionism and conflict in the workplace though both are inherent to the relationship between capital and labour. The social partnership model has been widely criticized for a number of reasons: for undermining confidence amongst workers in their ability to fight back and for confusing employers as workers' allies. Furthermore, on a basic level, partnerships have not been found to "curtail the unilateral management actions or management prerogatives over outsourcing, restructuring and downsizing initiatives (Kumar and Schenk, 2006).

Critics of the servicing model, organizing model, and certainly of the social-capital model, have argued that labour movement renewal will demand a "coherent political project aimed at rebuilding the strength of the working-class" (Fairbrother and Yates, 2003; Kumar and Schenk, 2006; Fletcher and Hurd, 1998). Neither the social partnership model nor the social movement unionism model goes far enough in imagining a real alternative to the dominant culture of business unionism in the US or to the social union character of Canadian unions that distinguishes the Canadian labour movement from its US counterpart. The next chapter will explore the union renewal strategies proposed by the CTW coalition during the recent split in the AFL-CIO, situate the recent split within the context of the various debates within the union renewal literature and expose the limitations of the CTW vision for union renewal.

The events that led to the split in the AFL-CIO

The first discussions that led to the creation of the “New Unity Partnership” (NUP), the precursor to the Change To Win (CTW) federation, began informally in 2001. That same year, the United Brotherhood of Carpenters (UBC) union left the AFL-CIO over a debate about per capita dues and organizing; the UBC argued that per capita dues were being wasted on the AFL-CIO and could be better spent on organizing workers (Hurd, 2004). The departure of the UBC from the AFL-CIO alienated leaders in the building trades unions but laid the foundation for an alliance between the “right-wing” Carpenters union and the pragmatic “left-wing” organizing unions, including SEIU and others (Fletcher, 2005). Organizing in and of itself was viewed both as a pragmatic and progressive focus for a labour movement declining in numbers and relevance (Fletcher, 2005).

In December 2002, Steven Lerner, SEIU strategist and the architect behind the SEIU’s popular Justice for Janitors campaign, released his analysis of the crisis in the US labour movement and his prescription for union revitalization called, “Three Steps to Reorganizing and Rebuilding the Labor Movement” (Lerner, 2002). The challenge for the labour movement and the source of labour’s decline he argued, had to do with the globalization of the world economy and the growth of massive industry-dominant corporations which threaten segments of the US economy, manufacturing in particular, with international competition and shifts in production overseas (Lerner, 2002). The labour movement needed a new organizing strategy, one that would renew labour’s capacity to “grow the middle-class” and to realize the “American Dream” (Lerner, 2002). Unless unions were able to dramatically increase density in key sectors of the economy, he argued, there “would be no significant economic advantage to being a union member” (2002).

Lerner proposed that the AFL-CIO allocate more resources, and force affiliates to allocate more resources, to an aggressive organizing program to reverse the decline in union density. Union organizing efforts, he argued, should target sectors tied to specific expanding domestic labour markets not threatened by “globalization” such as the service sector, where SEIU has concentrated most of its organizing. Lerner also proposed a restructuring of the labour movement through mergers between unions and a re-focusing of each union on a “core-jurisdiction” of the economy (2002). Lerner called upon the AFL-CIO leadership to take the steps necessary to cut approximately sixty unions down to between fifteen and twenty sector-specific unions. This, he argued, would reduce competition between unions and prevent unions from undercutting one another’s bargaining power. Lerner’s position paper also advocated a “pragmatic” agenda of international solidarity and a political strategy that would allow “maximum domestic political flexibility” (2002).

In the Fall of 2003, SEIU published “Unite To Win: A 21st Century Plan to Build New Strength for Working People” on the internet, a position paper that reiterated Lerner’s earlier call for restructuring the labour movement through mergers in order to facilitate jurisdictional specific organizing. The SEIU

proposals around jurisdiction-specific organizing were presented as “an antidote to creeping general unionism” (Hurd, 2004). The SEIU paper echoed Lerner’s earlier analysis of the crisis facing labour; “globalization” was threatening “American jobs, families and the hopes of future generations”. SEIU’s proposals talked about the need to create “good American jobs”, access to “affordable” health care, secure the right to unionize without employer interference and to devote more resources to organizing and to the creation of a political member-mobilization fund. The SEIU plan to restructure the labour movement required that the AFL-CIO be granted greater authority to force mergers between unions. SEIU proposed a per-capita dues rebate to “organizing unions” that would ostensibly liberate resources that could be re-dedicated to organizing.

In February of 2003, the leaders of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), SEIU, HERE, UNITE and LIUNA passed a proposal at an AFL-CIO Executive Council meeting to create a new executive committee to discuss the challenges confronting the labour movement (Hurd, 2004). On September 5, 2003, Business Week announced that the leaders of SEIU, HERE, UNITE, the Labourers and the Carpenters were meeting to discuss changes to the AFL-CIO. This meeting signaled the birth of the “New Unity Partnership” (NUP) alliance between the unions. Andy Stern, when questioned about the somewhat unusual alliance between the six unions, boasted that NUP leaders were all “radicals about growth” (Business Week, 2003). The NUP announced a ten-point program for reforming the labour movement based on the SEIU’s “Unite to Win” document. The circulation of the NUP document online sparked a debate about the crisis in the labour movement, failed AFL-CIO promises to deliver on organizing and the NUP proposals for revitalization.

Ruth Milkman describes the discussions that led to the split in the AFL-CIO as an “extraordinary debate that diffused throughout the labor movement” (Milkman, 2005) and after the December 2004 New Labor Forum and Queens College Labor Resources Center debate between labor leaders, Bronfenbrenner said that “for the first time in a very long while, there is a genuine debate going on in the labor movement about the kind of transformation required to rebuild labor’s strength, power and vision in today’s economy” (2005). There is no evidence however, to suggest that a genuine debate was taking place within the labour movement about the NUP proposals or anything else. The NUP proposals were not shared with rank-and-file workers enough to provoke a debate and rank-and-file workers, or even local union leaderships, had no input into formulating the proposals. The SEIU leaders diffused their ten-point plan for revitalization of the labour movement through a “glossy brochure, a sophisticated website and a blog” (Greenhouse, 2004).

On November 11, 2004, Stern called publicly upon the AFL-CIO to institute a series of reforms, including labour movement restructuring and dues rebates to organizing unions. Stern suggested that the SEIU would pull out of the federation if the changes weren’t adopted (Cleeland, 2004). Speculation surfaced immediately about whether or not there would be a contest for leadership of the

AFL-CIO at the convention the next summer and it was rumored that John Wilhelm, President of HERE would run against John Sweeney, whose “New Voices” slate had been elected to the leadership of the AFL-CIO a decade earlier. There was never a formal announcement that Wilhelm would run though at some point during the convention the NUP coalition called for John Sweeney to resign and there was an assumption, at least among the NUP leaders that Wilhelm would replace him (Milkman, 2005).

The popular labour leader in the months leading up to the split however, was not John Wilhelm, it was Stern. Online debates and interviews with the US corporate media and Stern’s claims about the need to reject the “old” class struggle model of unionism helped to position Stern as the leader that would bring the labour movement into the 21st century. Stern was described as the “fiery Ivy League-educated leader who steered his union through success in organizing janitors, healthcare workers and others”. Despite having been mentored by Sweeney in the SEIU and despite having a lot of the same rhetoric in common with his former mentor, Stern became the bold, militant and forward-looking labour leader that would lead a revitalization of the labour movement (Cleeland, 2004; Greenhouse, 2004).

In the winter of 2005, NUP formally dissolved into the “Unite To Win” coalition with a program almost identical to the NUP one. In the spring of 2005, UNITE and HERE merged. The IBT also joined the “Unite to Win” coalition and published a paper titled “Which Way for the AFL-CIO: The Teamster View”. The paper reiterated the NUP position in its emphasis on organizing and mergers. The Teamster paper called for a “streamlining” of the AFL-CIO bureaucracy and proposed to “eliminate any and all functions that were duplicated or deemed as more appropriate to affiliates”. The Teamsters proposed a direct rebate of one-half of the per capita tax to affiliates with a “serious strategic plan to deploy those resources for organizing” but steered away from the NUP proposals around organizing in core jurisdictions, instead proposing reforms to the AFL-CIO’s jurisdictional dispute mechanisms to encourage unions to stick within their “core industries” (Teamsters, 2006).

In June 2005, the “Unite to Win” coalition dissolved into another coalition called Change to Win. Then just before the AFL-CIO Chicago convention in July 2005, SEIU, UNITE-HERE, IBT and UFCW stopped paying dues to the AFL-CIO, signaled their intent to boycott the convention and announced the likelihood that their unions would leave the federation. In press conferences before and during the convention, CTW leaders insisted that the differences between the AFL-CIO and the CTW unions had grown irreconcilable and turned the blame on Sweeney for having not lived up to his election promises to reverse the decline in the US labour movement (Edsall, 2005). CTW leaders demanded that Sweeney step down from his position and make room for new leaders to take charge. When he refused to resign, SEIU, UNITE-HERE, IBT, UFCW and LIUNA left the AFL-CIO and were joined by the UBC and the UFW to form the new CTW Federation.

The CTW coalition immediately hired fifty-five public relations specialists and appointed Greg Tarpinian, former consultant to Teamsters President Jim Hoffa as Executive Director and Anna Burger, SEIU International Secretary-Treasurer and former Sweeney 1995 election campaign manager, as Chair of the Federation. In September 2005, the CTW Federation held a founding convention. In March 2006, the new federation held its first organizing convention in Las Vegas and launched their new campaign titled “Make Work Pay”, not surprisingly reminiscent of Sweeney’s “America Needs a Raise” campaign launched a decade earlier. Labour leaders, staff organizers and hand-picked rank-and-file workers came together to launch the new campaign and to listen to speeches filled with promises that the new federation would restore hope in the minds of working people and breathe new life into the “American Dream” (CTW, 2006).

Why was there a split in the AFL-CIO?

On the surface, the split in the AFL-CIO was over a disagreement about how to approach union renewal. The CTW unions claimed that they were forced to leave the AFL-CIO in order to devote more resources to organizing new members, accusing the AFL-CIO of placing too much emphasis on changing the political climate in the US to facilitate organizing. The CTW proposal on dues rebates to organizing unions was their main proposal to shift the Federation’s focus from politics to organizing. The CTW promised to devote all of its energies to organizing and for its part promoted a “quid-pro-quo” political strategy for labour; support to individual Democrat and Republican politicians in exchange for political support on a particular labour issue. Though it would not be a new thing for US labour to lend support to Democrats and Republicans alike, the CTW’s explicit “quid-pro-quo” approach reflects Stern’s brand of avowedly corporatist labour politics.

In reality however, the SEIU had spent \$65 million, more than the total spent by the AFL-CIO, on John Kerry’s 2004 presidential campaign (Smith, 2006). While Stern has been quite open about supporting both Democrat and Republican candidates in return for their support on an issue, there is no indication that the CTW federation will devote fewer resources to politics.

Others have argued that the split had more to do with a battle between labour personalities than it did with a disagreement over substantive issues. In various interviews leading up to the split, Stern certainly attempted to capture the limelight and stood out as the bold “new” face of the US labour movement. Since Stern did not have the numbers to win a bid for AFL-CIO leadership, when Sweeney refused to resign, Stern split the labour movement in order to assume control of part of it. In and of itself, this explanation also seems insufficient.

A third possible explanation for the split is the argument that the labour movement split into two camps, grouping the unions the least impacted by globalization into one, and the unions the most impacted by globalization into the other (Gindin, 2006). The postwar relocation of capital from the heavily unionized industrial centers of the US Midwest and Northeast to the South and

Southwest in search of cheaper labor and then later outside of the US has had a disastrous impact on the US labour movement. Many of the unions that have remained in the AFL-CIO – those unions representing the skilled construction trades, steelworkers, autoworkers and machinists – represent workers in those sectors that have been the hardest hit by capital's search for cheaper labour. The CTW unions represent workers concentrated in sectors where global trade and production is tied to local labour markets, i.e. hospitality, security, etc. SEIU, for example, has targeted building trades workers and security workers in the private service sector. SEIU is also targeting workers whose public sector jobs – in health care, etc – have undergone privatization. The CTW leadership has plans to focus its organizing efforts on workers in the most "stable" sectors of the economy, those sectors that offer the most opportunity for union growth in the US, either because workers in the service sector for example have never been organized or because jobs in the public sector have been sold to the non-union private sector.

Gindin's explanation however, does not account for the public sector unions. While there is no doubt that the public sector unions have been hard hit by welfare state restructuring and the privatization of public services, public sector unions like AFSCME, for example, represent workers tied to domestic labour markets.

The most plausible explanation for the split in the AFL-CIO would likely combine all three explanations. Though the CTW federation will not necessarily devote fewer resources to political campaigns, its political strategy is an explicitly Gompertist one which marks a small, but important difference between it and the AFL-CIO, at least on the surface. Lerner's focus on organizing expanding domestic labour markets such as the service sector and his open rejection of class struggle unionism in favor of a corporatist strategy for renewal suggests a combination of personality politics, i.e. a struggle for power, and a shrewd business plan for a business unionist, i.e. union "empire building".

Though the differences between the AFL-CIO and CTW are not major and one could not argue that the AFL-CIO represents the progressive alternative, Sweeney's vision of renewal is about organizing new workers while maintaining old labour commitments (i.e. labour's alliance with the Democrats) whereas Stern's vision targets new workers with a "new" brand of unionism that includes an expressed commitment to labour-management partnerships.

The assumption that underscores the CTW leadership's approach to renewal is that globalization is an unstoppable, inevitable process and that the most that organized labour can do is adapt to it. More accurately perhaps, Stern's vision for the labour movement with its clear rejection of "class struggle unionism" is an explicit endorsement of globalization. There is an underlying adherence to the logic of capitalism – workers need to find ways to help their employers remain competitive on the global market and the challenge for the union movement is to build unions that don't act as barriers to competition. UNITE-HERE Vice-President John Wilhelm for example, has argued that

“nobody’s going to stop globalization and we, as a society, we have to make the kind of jobs that can’t be exported, good jobs” (Wong, 2005).

The merger between UNITE and HERE is a good example of the CTW labour leadership’s strategic response to globalization. The UNITE-HERE leadership has boasted that the merger set an example for the kinds of mergers that should be encouraged by the AFL-CIO between unions organizing in the same sectors. The memberships of UNITE and HERE were not in the same sectors however, though the union memberships have similar identities, i.e. immigrant workers and low-wage racialized and/or women workers. The merger made sense not because the unions were organizing in the same sector but because UNITE had witnessed its membership decline as a result of outsourcing of the textile industry and HERE was targeting “stable” jobs in the laundries, casinos, hotels, etc.

The CTW leaders have seemingly adopted a clear business strategy around recruiting new members. For the leadership of CTW unions, the future of the US labour movement rests not in revitalizing the US working-class through opposition to neoliberal globalization, but rather in targeting those sectors of the economy where the jobs, and the corresponding union dues, cannot be exported. A closer examination of the NUP proposals for reform will help to illustrate this point a bit further.

The NUP proposals

In a 2005 news article, Johanne Wypijeski, journalist for *The Nation*, offered this take on the split: “no political vibrancy or meaningful debate, no fundamental power shift or even analysis, no movement mojo, nothing revolutionary or even progressive is discernible in the schism... except as props or fodder for rhetoric, workers have been left out” (Wypijewski, 2005). Up until the moment the split was announced in the corporate media, more workers were probably unaware that a split was imminent than were made aware. This would not be surprising. Debates leading up to the split were never had at the grassroots level. Furthermore, there are arguably more similarities between the two sides of the split than there are differences. Neither the Sweeney camp nor the Stern camp has proposed a departure from business as usual or a clear alternative direction for the labour movement. Part of the explanation for this is that neither side of the split has offered more than a superficial diagnosis of the crisis in the labour movement to begin with.

According to Stephen Lerner, the decline in the US labour movement has come about as a result of the globalization of the world economy, characterized by the domination of the economy by global corporations, which has threatened certain segments of the economy that have traditionally been the site of “good American jobs” (Lerner, 2002). Unions, for their part, have not been strategic and aggressive enough about how they approach organizing workers. The result has been a decline in union density and thus a decline in what Lerner and the CTW leadership refer to as “union power”.

While there is no doubt that there have been profound changes in the US economy, the decline in union density in the US is hardly a new phenomenon. Union density has been on the decline in the US since the late 1940s. The roots of the crisis in the US labour movement reach much deeper into labour's historical development.

The introduction of the Taft-Hartley Act in 1947 had a significant impact on the labour movement by curbing the rights of unions and enhancing the rights of employers. The Taft-Hartley Act outlawed wildcat strikes, solidarity strikes, secondary boycotts and mass picketing and required union officials to sign affidavits stating that they were not members of the Communist Party (Smith, 2006). Under Taft-Hartley, states were allowed to pass laws banning the closed union shop, the president of the US was given the authority to impose a "cooling-off period" on strikes that threatened the "national interest", and union leaders could be held responsible for illegal strikes thus acting as "gatekeepers" of rank-and-file rebellion. In *Subterranean Fire: A History of Working-Class Radicalism in the United States*, Sharon Smith points out that more Democrats joined the Republicans in voting to pass the Taft-Hartley Act than voted against it (2006). Truman vetoed the Act knowing that Congress had enough votes to override his veto and then by the middle of 1948 had used the Act twelve times to break strikes (Smith, 2006). After Taft-Hartley was passed, the labour movement began its long period of decline.

Therefore the crisis in the US labour movement must be traced back farther than Lerner would care to acknowledge. Fletcher argues that the problem in the US labour movement has to do with the "ideological premises of US trade unionism, going back at least as far as Samuel Gompers" with its rejection of class politics in favour of "special interest" politics and protection of member interests' above the interests of the working-class as a whole (Fletcher, 2005). The Gompers view of the labour movement assumes labour's subordination to capital. Neither side of the split has rejected the Gompers view of the labour movement or proposed an alternative to the dominant culture of business unionism in the US. In fact CTW's political strategy of supporting those who will support labour's interests regardless of their political stripe is clearly Gompersist.

Neither side of the split, it has been argued, suggested more than a "deck-chair rearrangement on a sinking ship" (Fletcher, 2005; Tucker, 2005). The proposals centered on restructuring the labour movement, merging unions, and forcing unions to adhere to "core jurisdictions". There was never a debate about the wider purpose of the labour movement. Stern's proposal to consolidate unions into a dozen or so large sector-specific unions mirrors the SEIU's own internal restructuring process that has taken place over the last decade or so and which has resulted in the merger of dozens of locals into a much smaller number mega-locals. At least three of the CTW affiliates, including SEIU, UNITE-HERE and UFCW, have implemented drastic top-down internal restructuring in recent years through trusteeships and mergers which has been an essential part of the process

of centralizing leadership and institutionalizing the organizing model. (Hurd, 2004).

Critics of the CTW coalition's restructuring proposals argue that the restructuring of the labour movement through forced mergers will lead to a loss of democratically elected leaders and put the control of unions in the hands of a few, just the opposite of what it will take to revitalize the labour movement. Lerner and the other CTW leaders would argue that union density must come before internal union democracy; it is too soon to speak of union democracy when too few workers belong to a union. Stern, for example, has argued that "true union democracy is impossible when workers who do the same type of work and deal with the same employers don't have the opportunity to decide how to pool their strength behind common strategies" (Bickerton, 2005). Implicit in Stern's argument is the idea that union democracy will depend on the successful merger of multiple unions into sector-specific unions.

The CTW's emphasis on organizing and the "moral highground" the CTW unions seem to have acquired in their focus on organizing in industries with a high concentration of low-wage racialized and/or women workers and immigrants has earned them a certain amount of forgiveness for their undemocratic top-down internal restructuring approach. To be sure, the labour movement needs to transcend its traditional representation of the white male industrial working-class and focus efforts on organizing racialized workers and women. It is not enough however, and furthermore it is patronizing, to allow workers to join unions but not to lead them. The organizational culture of unions must also change so that racialized workers and women don't just belong to unions but also have some democratic control over the direction of their own unions as well.

The NUP proposals around organizing called for a national commitment to the organizing model. The call for unions to dedicate more resources to organizing has been at issue since the organizing model became popular in the 1990s. During the AFL-CIO leadership election, Sweeney's "New Voices" regime promised to devote one-third of the AFL-CIO budget to organizing. The Sweeney leadership moved the Organizing Institute into an organizing department, increased the budget, and established a fund to subsidize strategic organizing campaigns (Hurd, 2004). Thousands of college-educated students participated in the AFL-CIO's "Union Summer" organizer training program and according to Harold Meyerson, "going to work for a union became a compelling career choice" (1998).

The original AFL-CIO Elected Leader Task Force on Organizing during the Sweeney regime was in fact chaired by Bruce Raynor from UNITE, John Wilhelm from HERE and Tom Woodroof from the SEIU, all now leaders of the CTW federation. In 1996 the Elected Leader Task Force on Organizing released a document titled "Organizing for Change, Changing to Organize" which proposed strategies for increasing union density, including greater allocation of resources to organizing, the development of staff with organizing expertise, and a strategic plan for membership mobilization around organizing. The assumption implicit in

this directive is not unlike the NUP one: bigger budgets for recruitment will spur a quantitative rebound in union membership (Hurd, 2004).

Critics of the NUP proposals on organizing have argued that it will take more than resources and housecalls to reverse the decline in the labour movement. Democracy, they have argued, “is an indispensable element in building a new mass movement of the working-class” and the revitalization of the labour movement “will happen only as it becomes part of a larger social movement driven by a militant response to injustice well beyond our current ranks and workplaces” (Tucker, 2005).

There are few signs of an independent working-class movement, at least within the ranks of organized labour. Neither side of the split has proposed a break with the two capitalist parties in the US. Stern has proposed alliances with both parties just as when Sweeney ran for election and insisted that the federation’s political strategy not center around one alliance with a political party but support candidates “who are accountable to workers and their families on issues that are necessary and important (Gonzales, 1998). The CTW federation has pledged its support to politicians, either Republican or Democrat, who support “working family values” (Crosby, 2006). Furthermore, the CTW’s greater emphasis on organizing versus politics remains to be seen; the SEIU gave more money to the Democrats in the last presidential election than any other union (Crosby, 2006).

Mike Davis, among other scholars, has documented US labour’s long-standing alliance with the Democratic Party and explored the question of why there has never been a mass working-class party in the US, a question that is well beyond the scope of this paper. In reference to labour’s early alliance with the pro-slavery Democratic Party at the beginning of the twentieth century, Mike Davis argues that “in the absence of a working-class anti-slavery current, labor lost the chance to forge its own links of unity with the Black masses of the South or to create its own revolutionary-democratic tradition” (Davis, 1986). Since that time, the US labour movement has continued to align itself with the Democratic Party, which has continued to fail working-class movements and movements for racial and gender justice over and over again.

The CTW coalition has not proposed a political alternative to either of the two parties in the US nor has it proposed to build stronger relationships with social movements or other progressive forces in the US. The CTW coalition, in general, has not proposed alternative directions for the US labour movement. If there is anything that distinguishes the CTW leadership from the Sweeney leadership it is Stern’s open and public re-commitment of the labour movement to Gompersism and his suggestion that this re-commitment to corporatist unionism will lead to the revitalization of the US labour movement. Stern has championed the organizing model and union partnerships with employers as an approach to union renewal, declaring in his new book “A Country that Works: Getting America Back on Track” that “government, business and labor must work

together as a team in order for America to prosper in the new global economy” (Early, 2006).

But what are the implication for the Canadian sections of the CTW unions? Would Stern’s brand of union renewal be embraced in the Canadian context? The integration of the Canadian and US economies and labour movements necessitates a more in depth analysis of the impact of the AFL-CIO split on the structure, political orientation and strategic focus of the labour movement in Canada.

Implications of the split for the labour movement in Canada

In the months prior to the split in the AFL-CIO, Geoff Bickerton, labour reporter for *Canadian Dimension* wrote, “Canadian unionists are used to reflecting on the problems of the American labour movement... as we prepare for the upcoming Canadian Labour Congress convention, we can learn much from their reflections upon the solutions to our common problems” (2005). Drawing upon material gathered through interviews with elected Canadian leaders and staff from SEIU, UNITE-HERE, UFCW, Teamsters, the OFL, CAW and CLC, this chapter will explore some of the reflections of Canadian labour leaders on the solutions proposed during the split in the AFL-CIO and unpack some of the lessons that have been drawn from the split. The lessons to be drawn from the split are not the ones that are most apparent. The most important lessons to be drawn from the split have to do with lessons about the limitations of the debate and the solutions proposed; lessons about what not to do in the context of imagining possibilities for union renewal in Canada.

Arguably, the impacts of the split on the labour movement in Canada, in concrete and measurable terms, are likely to be few and far between. The CTW unions in Canada do not have plans to lead a similar split in the CLC. Alex Dagg, International Executive Vice-President of UNITE-HERE, has said that the CTW unions in Canada “don’t need to leave the CLC or the OFL to work together” (Dagg, 2006). Though the Canadian sections of the CTW unions have been meeting on a semi-regular basis to discuss how to coordinate some of their efforts, there is no consensus on what the unions might be able to achieve through working together. And while there have been general discussions about CTW within the CLC, for the most part the CTW unions in Canada have continued to actively participate in the CLC Executive and have indicated “that for the most part, they are not interested in going down that direction”, according to Hassan Yussuff, Secretary-Treasurer of the CLC (2006). After the split, Wayne Samuelson, President of the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) received calls from the leaders of the CTW unions in Canada reassuring him of their commitment to the OFL and the CLC (Samelson, 2006).

Most of the leaders of the CTW unions in Canada that I interviewed view the CLC as weak or irrelevant in its capacity to coordinate union renewal efforts. Bob Linton, National Coordinator for Communications and Government and Foreign Affairs for UFCW, however, argued that the CLC has “made an honest attempt with respect to organizing and made an attempt to help affiliates”, citing the CLC’s support for the UFCW’s campaign to unionize Walmart as an example (Linton, 2006). Hassan Yussuff, in contrast, pointed out that the CLC used to have an organizing department but “affiliates told us to get out of that area – there’s work we could do around the legislative context that makes it better to organize but that’s about it” (Yussuff, 2006).

Linton’s sentiment should be regarded as the exception rather than the rule, as the CLC has largely been forced out of organizing by the affiliates, as Yussuff suggests. The Canadian labour movement’s decentralized structure and

the domination of the CLC by some of its major affiliates (i.e. CUPE, CAW) means that the CLC has less power to direct the labour movement than the central labour body in the US. The CLC affiliates simply don't look to the CLC to provide leadership on issues of union organizing and renewal. Perhaps the relative weakness of the CLC vis-à-vis the AFL-CIO explains part of the interest in CTW among the Canadian sections of the CTW unions. Certainly a more centralized approach to union renewal "from above" would mirror the top-down approach these international unions have taken in the US in order to transform local unions into organizing unions.

Apart from having different expectations of the central labour body in Canada, there is a general sense among the CTW unions in Canada that there is not the same crisis in the Canadian labour movement as there is in the US labour movement due to the existence of higher union density rates and friendlier labour laws in Canada. Furthermore, there just isn't a sense that labour is under attack (Yussuff, 2006). Linton, for example, argues that "although union density is down in Canada, we're still doing pretty good, we're still growing" (Linton, 2006). Though it is true that union density rates in Canada are triple the US rates, the tendency to compare the Canadian situation to the US fosters a false sense of security among trade unionists in Canada. There should be no doubt in the minds of trade unionists in Canada, having witnessed significant shifts from unionized workplaces to non-unionized workplaces in the manufacturing sector and thirty or so years of neoliberal labour market and state restructuring, that labour in Canada is also under attack.

Though the interviews reveal that the CTW unions in Canada are not imagining a similar split in the CLC, it is worth pointing out that even if the leaders of the Canadian sections of the CTW unions were to argue for similar reforms to the CLC, the balance of power between the Canadian sections of the CTW unions and the rest of the labour movement in Canada is also such that a transfer of the NUP proposals to Canada is not likely to happen without the support of the rest of the labour movement and without the support of CUPE and the CAW in particular, the two largest unions in Canada. The affiliates that split from the AFL-CIO are different affiliates in Canada "in terms of size and structure and influence in the Canadian labour movement" (Yussuff, 2006). The union memberships of the Canadian sections of the CTW unions make up only 18% of the total union membership of the Canadian labour movement compared to 40% in the US.

The significant decline in the importance of international unions in Canada has occurred since the growth of the national industrial unions beginning in the 1930s. Whereas at the turn of the twentieth century approximately 95% of union members belonged to international unions, splits over divergent ideas about the direction of unions and the rapid unionization of the public sector in Canada has resulted in a majority of union members in Canada now belonging to Canadian unions. The CTW unions in Canada are also tied to the CLC because the national unions comprise a potential threat to their memberships. CTW unions may fear

raiding campaigns from the larger and more popular national unions. For example, such tendencies have already manifested themselves with the CAW raids of SEIU in 2001 but one example. Unions like the CAW can appeal to the nationalist sentiment of Canadian workers and the lack of internal union democracy in the CTW unions to raid the CTW unions in Canada.

The leaders of the Canadian sections of the CTW unions are, however, optimistic about the potential for union renewal in the US as a result of the split and enthusiastic about the solutions that have been championed by the CTW federation. Furthermore, most of the CTW leaders in Canada think that some of the CTW proposals could be applied to the Canadian situation. For one, these leaders believe that the CTW unions have correctly diagnosed the root of the crisis in the US labour movement and its corresponding main solution. The problem in the US labour movement, according to the leaders of the Canadian sections of the CTW unions, is a crisis in union density. The CTW leadership, for its part, is credited with having a “courageous leader” in Andy Stern, a leader with a vision, someone who “knows how to play the game” (Bouvier, 2006; Dagg, 2006). According to Dagg, Bouvier, Linton and Bill Hume, Director of Organizing for SEIU Local 1 in Canada, the CTW leaders have correctly identified the importance of charting aggressive organizing campaigns in order to reverse the decline in the US labour movement.

The Canadian labour movement, the CTW unions in Canada would argue, needs to embrace a similar aggressive approach to organizing. The sense among the leaders of the CTW unions in Canada is that unions in Canada waste too much time waiting for social-democratic governments to introduce labour-friendly legislation and that “we can’t wait for governments to change for labour, we just need to go out there and fight, negotiate our contracts, increase our percentage of workers and then we’ll have more power” (Bouvier, 2006). Unions in Canada, Bouvier, President of Teamsters Canada argues, “are forgetting the basic thing, which is to organize the unorganized and make sure we try to survive in this competition” (Bouvier, 2006). Most of the leaders of the CTW unions make regular reference to needing to focus on building “union power”. Union power, in this case, refers to the numbers of workers who belong to a union. The fight to increase “union power” is about increasing numbers in a particular labour market or jurisdiction and increasing power at the bargaining table. But union density only gives the labour movement the *potential* power in the workplace and in politics. Not one of the leaders of the CTW unions in Canada mentioned the power of workers to withdraw their labour power. It seems that direct action, including strikes, sit-downs, work-to-rule, etc, is a weapon of the past, and though none of the leaders I interviewed articulated a clear rejection of class struggle unionism as Stern does, it is clear that their vision is focused on increasing union density and not on increasing worker militancy.

The leaders of the CTW unions in Canada also express support for the CTW proposals around organizing in “core jurisdictions” and consolidating the labour movement into sector-specific unions. Alex Dagg talked about the need to

advance discussions about jurisdiction specific organizing in Canada. The Canadian labour movement, she argued, “is worse than in the US with overlapping jurisdictions; we’re all on each others’ turf... unions are organizing everything that lands on their doorstep and there is little strategic thought” (Dagg, 2006). Bill Hume talked about needing to encourage “certain unions” back to their traditional bargaining units (Hume, 2006). The SEIU’s interest in “core jurisdiction” is not entirely surprising however, given the history of CAW raiding of the SEIU in Ontario. There have also been jurisdictional disputes between the CTW unions in Canada since most of the unions represent workers in different sectors and are not “sector-specific” unions themselves, though UNITE-HERE for example, is trying to establish itself as the union of hotel workers. Dagg has proposed to the other CTW unions in Canada that they consider “swapping workers” to consolidate representation of hotel workers with UNITE-HERE (Linton, 2006; Hume, 2006). According to Linton, UNITE-HERE’s suggestion to “swap workers” has not been taken seriously by the other unions as of yet.

The reality is that most unions in Canada are general unions and unions are not going to “swap workers” they already represent in jurisdictions that are claimed by other unions. Yates argues that “jurisdictional integrity is often a cloak behind which many unions hide their inability to organize or lack of commitment to organizing or their unwillingness to accept that a union’s jurisdiction needs to be balanced with workers’ democratic right to union representation” (Yates, 2004). The challenge for unions is not to “swap workers” but rather to find ways to strengthen bargaining power through inter-union cooperation. There is no reason, apart from unions needing to overcome their competition with one another, that multiple unions could not form multi-union bargaining team and sit at master bargaining tables (Yates, 2004). The proposals around sector-specific organizing would be palatable if unions were to agree to concentrate organizing in specific sectors as part of a cooperative effort to organize the working-class as a whole. But the proposal as it has been suggested by the CTW unions is about unions organizing and representing their own “interests” and not about a collaborative strategic effort to organize the class as a whole.

The leaders of the CTW unions in Canada also support forced mergers which they see as key to consolidating bargaining power. Mergers, according to Dagg, “are not an anti-democratic thing” because “it’s about building standards and raising standards and ultimately we can be super democratic and have no unions” (Dagg, 2006). And mergers, according to Dagg and Bouvier, allow unions to take on their employers, who are increasingly global in nature; “everybody realizes that there’s gotta be mergers of unions, we have to downsize, the structure is too big” (Bouvier, 2006). The vision for labour movement restructuring appears to match the logic of the corporation with its emphasis on mergers and downsizing and streamlining of operations. There is also a false dichotomy that has been set up with “standards” on the one hand and “democracy” on the other as though the two are opposed to each other and/or mutually exclusive.

On the question of labour's political strategy, the leaders of the CTW unions in Canada, with the exception of Bob Linton from the UFCW, were unanimous in their support for a "quid-pro-quo" approach to politics. They are aligned with Hargrove on his recent position in support of strategic voting and would like to see a break in labour's traditional alliance with the social democratic NDP. Dagg, for example, argues that strategic voting by unions "makes the most sense" and gave the example of UNITE-HERE's political strategy in the last federal election in Canada where the union supported five candidates because of their support for specific UNITE-HERE campaign issues. These included four NDP candidates and one Liberal candidate (Dagg, 2006). The leaders of the CTW unions in Canada, with the exception of Bob Linton, argued that unions in Canada "need to learn from the Americans and decide what politician is going to take our issues forward, support that candidate and then make them accountable" (Hume, 2006; Dagg, 2006; Bouvier, 2006).

The support among some Canadian labour leaders for what has come to be referred to as "strategic voting", i.e. voting to prevent the "worst" outcome, which in the Canadian context means voting to prevent Conservative candidates from winning, is alarming, and not because the labour movement should unquestioningly support the NDP. The CAW's support for strategic voting, for example, is alarming because the decision to break with the NDP is not about what is best for the working-class, it is about the CAW's relationship with the Liberals and their efforts to secure subsidies for the auto industry (Gindin, 2005). The CAW's effort to secure subsidies for the auto industry comes at the expense of the rest of the working-class whose taxes will also go to support the Big Three Automakers. When unions advocate "strategic voting", they are often advocating votes for a candidate who may support the particular interests of the individual union at any given time, on any given campaign issue, in any given geographical area, but who may be working against the interests of other workers. Strategic voting is not about finding the best political strategy for the working-class as a whole and mirrors the Gompers approach to politics championed by Stern and others in the US.

The interviews with Buzz Hargrove, Wayne Samelson and Hassan Yussuff revealed a greater skepticism about CTW and underscored important differences between the culture of unionism in Canada and the US. Yussuff and Hargrove argued that for unions to become more relevant, workers need to see that unions will fight for them "and if they're seen as catering to corporations, workers aren't going to join unions... the fightback is what's important" (Hargrove, 2006). Yussuff spoke at length about the culture of social unionism that distinguishes the Canadian union movement from its US counterpart. The Canadian labour movement's fundamental commitment to struggle on an ongoing basis, Yussuff argued, is what makes it a more dynamic labour movement (Yussuff, 2006). Hargrove and Yussuff argued that the Canadian labour movement's "ability to mobilize members where we feel we're under attack" and to "without hesitation galvanize our membership to take on the government or

employers and the battle that needs to be fought” is what makes the Canadian labour movement unique (Yussuff, 2006).

Despite Hargrove and Yussuff’s praise for the Canadian labour movement’s readiness to fight back, there are a number of recent indications, with the exception of a few inspiring examples of course, that the Canadian labour movement, and certainly the CAW, has lost its militant character. For example the CAW, which was born out of a refusal to accept concessions, recently agreed to open up their collective agreement at the Oshawa plant as part of an overall strategy of preserving jobs (Gindin, 2006).

To summarize, the reflections of the leaders of the CTW unions in Canada on the CTW proposals and the general support for their application in Canada show that these leaders have drawn inspiration from the split in the AFL-CIO and support many of the CTW proposals. In the Canadian context however, where union density is almost three times as high, where the vast majority of workers belong to national unions, and where there is a history of Canadian nationalist independence from international unions linked to social unionism, it is unclear how the CTW proposals would be applicable, let alone embraced. Moreover, I would argue that the CTW vision for union renewal is not a progressive vision of union renewal and therefore not one that the labour movement in Canada should pursue.

For as Rose Ann DeMoro, Executive Director of the California Nurses Union said, “the specific proposals by the Change to Win group are structural and bureaucratic, not programmatic” and “there is no evidence any of these changes would solve labor’s problems”. None of the unions attempted to engage rank-and-file workers in analytical discussions about the problems workers are facing and of the root causes. Rank-and-file workers were not involved in debating strategies and tactics. The long history of capitalism, patriarchy, racism and imperialism in the US was never part of the analysis of the problems facing workers in the US or part of the explanation for the decline of the US labour movement. Neither side of the split entertained a break from the two capitalist parties in the US or considered the possibility of establishing an independent working-class party. Some of the most inspiring examples of recent worker organizing in the US, including the Immokolee Workers, the Miami Workers Centre, the LA Garment Workers Centre, Asian Immigrant Women Advocates in Oakland and Domestic Workers United in New York City to name just a few, led by immigrant workers, low-income women and racialized workers in the US, were not once mentioned. Neither side of the split proposed building genuine alliances with social movement organizations (such as Sista II Sista, United for Peace and Justice, etc) or with any of the non-sectarian socialist organizations such as Solidarity or Freedom Road Socialist Organization.

The CTW leaders are either silent on the question of union democracy or explicit in their belief that recruiting more numbers to unions is more important than any kind of meaningful worker participation, direction and control over unions. SEIU’s trusteeship of the Los Angeles Janitor Workers Union Local 199

in 1995 when a rank-and-file group of janitors within the local ran a slate of candidates for the union's executive board called the Multiracial Alliance and won, is one of the clearest examples of that union's opposition to democratic unionism (Bacon, 1995). The Multiracial Alliance leadership included workers with experience in union organizing in their home countries in Central America. The prior experience of these immigrant workers made them central to the success of the initial Justice for Janitors organizing campaign and they also had the expectation that the workers would have control over their unions once they were members. These expectations were unfulfilled which led to the formation of the MultiRacial Alliance and subsequent trusteeship of the local when the workers were elected to office.

If the split in the US is going to bring about any change at all, it will be limited to a re-commitment to Gompersism and the culture of business unionism that is pervasive throughout most of the unions in the US. Stern believes, as did Gompers, that unions should act in their own self-interest. The challenge for the Canadian labour movement is to undertake a serious evaluation of the current condition of the labour movement in the context of neoliberalism and to engage a movement-wide debate that dares to imagine what else is possible for the working class as a whole.

Conclusion

To be sure, there are important differences between the Canadian labour movement and the US labour movement. But the labour movement in Canada is arguably in a crisis of its own, with union density declining, particularly in the private sector, and a “tepid reformism and corporatism” threatening to subsume whatever historical commitments to social unionism and social democratic politics might have existed in the past (Rosenfeld, 2007). In light of the crisis in the Canadian labour movement, trade unionists in Canada will need to engage in our own union renewal debates.

During the earlier debates about union renewal that juxtaposed an organizing model against a servicing model, Canadian trade unionists rejected the direct transfer of the organizing model to Canada amidst militant nationalist struggles for independence from international unions who were willing to accept concessions. These days, some progressive trade unionists in Canada have begun to look for inspiration from some of the international unions in Canada, including UNITE-HERE, SEIU and UFCW, inspired by their organizing culture and some of the recent campaigns where immigrant workers, racialized workers and women have have, at least on the surface, been front and center. John Cartwright, for example, argues that amidst all of the ways that the labour movement will need to transform itself, “the most fundamental one will be the need for our unions to make organizing the first priority” (Cartwright, 2006).

Though organizing must be a central priority for the labour movement, recruiting new workers to join unions in and of itself is not enough. The international “organizing” unions in Canada, as the interviews with some of the leaders of the unions have revealed, have more in common with their US counterparts than their dedication to organizing. They are also committed to the model of business unionism that has dominated the US labour movement since Gompers and as such also opposed to democratic unionism lest workers begin to develop their own capacities to challenge the widespread sexism and racism within the labour movement or the assumption that the labour movement can never be more than a junior partner to capital. Transformation of the labour movement will also require transforming the organizational culture unions and of the labour movement as a whole.

As trade unionists in Canada consider the options, one option is to embrace an approach similar to the CTW approach: greater cooperation with employers and a more “efficient” business unionism, mergers between unions, the organizing model imposed from above, etc. Another option is to imagine union renewal with a socialist-feminist character. This would involve more than a renewed commitment to social democratic politics. This would require nothing less than an internal revolution within the labour movement, involving the democratization of our unions and renewing the labour movement as an instrument of working-class struggle, where the working-class includes all workers and not just the white male industrial working-class. It cannot be done without strong alliances between labour, other social movements and an

independent radical Left. This will require organizing workers in all aspects of workers lives, as workers lives' intersect with struggles around public health care, education and housing, immigration, violence against women and with struggles for genuine racial and gender equality inside our unions and within society as a whole. We will need to build a labour movement independent from capital, a movement that rejects subsidies for corporations on the backs of other workers and rejects the idea that competitiveness strategies can be progressive. We should not for a second waste our time feeling secure or self-congratulatory about our relatively stable union memberships as compared with the US labour movement. But nor should we make the mistake of drawing inspiration too quickly from the solutions that have been proposed south of the border. The CTW federation has declared its rejection of class struggle unionism in exchange for a renewal of the business unionism tradition that has dominated the culture of the US labour movement since Samuel Gompers. The lesson to be drawn from the split is that if we are to genuinely contemplate what it will take to build an independent working-class movement in Canada, we should move swiftly in the opposite direction.

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