

THE CHRISTIAN LABOUR ASSOCIATION OF CANADA

THE CHRISTIAN LABOUR ASSOCIATION OF CANADA:  
AN ORGANISATIONAL STUDY OF A SMALL CANADIAN UNION

By  
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### Abstract:

The Christian Labour Association of Canada (CLAC) is a small Canadian union that was founded in the 1950s by Dutch Calvinist immigrants to Canada. Partially because of this unique background the union has developed several distinctive policies and approaches toward labour relations and collective bargaining. These approaches have lead to conflict with other labour unions. This first academic study of the CLAC lays out the history of the union from its foundation until the present. It discusses what its distinct practices are through the interviewing of CLAC staff and the examination of various union documents. The union is then placed in the context of the wider Canadian labour movement. This is the first academic study of the CLAC.

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## CHAPTER ONE -- INTRODUCTION:

During the late 1990s three articles appeared in four alternative leftist publications<sup>1</sup> about a small Canadian labour union. The writers were livid about this union's representation of a group of telemarketing employees at the Univision Marketing corporation in Willowdale, Ontario. The case was unique in itself as the firm's employees themselves had taken both the company and the union to the Ontario Labour Relations Board (OLRB) accusing the former of unfair labour practices and the latter of abandonment.<sup>2</sup> The authors of the articles echoed the words of various labour leaders from the Canadian Labour Congress' (CLC) affiliated unions decrying it as a "company union" that was into making "sweetheart deals" with employers that undercut union rates of pay in the construction and healthcare industries. Mary Rowles, assistant to the president of the CLC, told the Ottawa Citizen in 1997 that this union was "not a real union. Their reputation is that they're a company union, invited in by companies to create sub-standard agreements that act as a shield to keep out real unions."<sup>3</sup> It was the sort of union that employers loved to call in to restrict the demands of its workforce. It was a union that had almost never walked the picket line and put forth a right-wing conservative Christian view of labour relations

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<sup>1</sup>These articles were by Bruce Livesey (September/October 1998) "Who are our brothers?: The Christian Labour Association of Canada" Our Times 17:5:27-32; Paul Jay (January/February, 1999) "The Christians versus the Unions" This Magazine 26-31; and one by Charlie Angus (March 1998) "Dial M for Money: Labour unrest in the charity fundraising biz" HighGrader Magazine available online at <http://www.grievousangels.com/highgrader/articles/dialm.html> which was accessed on July 22, 2002. A slightly altered version of the Angus article also appeared in the Toronto alternative weekly NOW magazine with the title: Dialling for trouble: Telemarketing staff take on their employer -- and their union. Now Magazine available online at <http://www.nowtoronto.com/issues/17/29/News/feature.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Ontario Labour Relations Board case 2127-97-U Krista Beurling, Keith Bird, Brad Dieno, Karen Hall, Lori Hall, David Hooker, Elizabeth McLean, Blaine Scott and Carolyn Steingard, Applicants vs. Chrstian Labour Association of Canada, Univision Marketing Group Inc., Responding Parties. Reported January / February 1998, p.115 ff. Hereafter referred to as OLRB case 2127-97-U.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Livesey, 1998:27.



that denied the possibilities of “class struggle,”<sup>4</sup> opting instead for cooperation and a “non-adversarial” approach with management. What was more was that they were a growing union. They had more than doubled their membership in the previous ten years to over 25,000 members by the late 1990s and they seemed to be spreading a form of unionism that lacked radicalism across the country.

This union is the Christian Labour Association of Canada (hereafter CLAC). It is, indeed, a union that gives one a very different impression from mainstream Canadian unions from the outset. For along with its extreme reluctance to call its members out on strike, and its opposition to the “class struggle” between employers and employees, it openly ties its philosophy to an evangelical Christian philosophy often associated with “right wing” political tendencies. Its recruitment video begins with a stewards’ meeting address given by a, yet to be infamous, Alberta Member of the Legislative Assembly named Stockwell Day.<sup>5</sup>

This thesis is an investigation of the CLAC - a small Canadian labour union set up on an explicitly and uniquely Protestant Christian basis. This is an organisational study that looks at how this labour union operates in the particular context of the Canadian economy and labour relations scene. Such a research project interests me for a number of reasons. First, at a general level, I am very suspicious of such a black and white rendering of any other organisation. The CLAC has been painted in a very bad light by members of the labour community. My

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<sup>4</sup> From my reading of the CLAC’s documents, The Guide, and the interviews with the leaders of the CLAC, I have the sense that a Christian view to labour relations would be one that emphasizes cooperation and reconciliation over conflict, that sees an important union task in the building of community (between workers, employers and customers) and believes in freedom of conscience for the membership.

<sup>5</sup> CLAC: a union with a difference - a union with a future. Video: CLAC.

undergraduate studies, in particular my bachelor's thesis,<sup>6</sup> have led me to believe that listening to both sides of a story brings out various complexities that would be otherwise missed.

The CLAC also interested me as it brought together several intellectual and personal themes I have previously investigated. In particular, the CLAC interested me as a social movement. It was founded in the 1950s by idealistic Dutch Reformed immigrants. What had motivated such individuals to create this movement? I was interested in how its religious beliefs and preconceptions influenced its interpretation of the social world. Moreover, I have an interest in the Canadian labour movement and particularly in the struggles for social justice and change. How would an organisation with a perspective on labour relations that differed from mainstream unions deal with the common problems facing Canadian workers.

An analysis of the CLAC must be situated in a wider institutional, economic and political context. The CLAC is different from other unions because of its strong intellectual and historical roots within the traditions and preconceptions of Dutch civil society and the Netherlands' experience of labour relations. However, it has existed within the context of a rapidly changing milieu of the Canadian working-class and trade unionism. These changes, which have impacted on the composition of the workforce, the job market, and Canadian unionism, have also effected the CLAC. The most significant of these changes has been a growing diversification from its original base in the construction industry.<sup>7</sup> The union has moved beyond its original pattern of

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<sup>6</sup> Robert G. Thomas (2001). Mike Harris' Ontario and the Bungling of a mass politics: an examination and critique of social protests in Ontario, 1995-1999. St. Catharines, ON.: Brock University (unpublished manuscript).

<sup>7</sup> From statistics provided by the CLAC one has a very diverse picture of the union's national membership. Although the union's representation of the construction industry has continued to grow moderately in both relative and absolute terms in the Eastern Region (i.e. Ontario, from 14.5% in 1995 to 20% of the membership in mid-2001 of members) its growth in the Western Region has increased modestly in relative terms

representation in the construction industry, and like other industrial unions, has entered into the healthcare and service sectors. Although the CLAC has an original base in construction, a traditional male-dominated industry, it has come to see a great deal of its growth in other more feminised sectors which have a much shorter history of unionisation.

The CLAC brought into the Canadian labour relations scene a Protestant, Christian-based form of unionism. Although this would be a unique departure for English Canada, it has antecedents within the Québec Catholic labour movement. Much like the CLAC, the Catholic workers and clergy in Québec fought for a type of industrial relations that did its best to avoid the use of strikes. The Confédération des travailleurs catholiques du Canada (CTCC) was founded at Hull in 1921. It believed that strikes were a “dangerous weapon” of last resort and fought for a living wage for Québec’s workers.<sup>8</sup> There was also a belief that the CTCC should work toward a more just society based on a Catholic corporatist model. According to this model, different occupations would become part of professional corporations. These would be meeting places for the representatives of management and workers and would look after the common interests of all. Ideally, at these meetings workers and management representatives would discuss diverse workplace issues including wages, working conditions, apprenticeships and even profit-sharing.

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although it grew by some 3,500 members (growing from 39% in 1995 to 40% of members in mid-2001). Viewing this from the other side we see continued growth in the service sector in the West (from 38% (1995) to 37% (2001) with an increase of about 4,200). While in the East there has been a modest increase in service representation and a continued growth in the healthcare sector (in service from 199 to 273 members or 3.6% (1995) to 3.9% (mid-2001); healthcare meanwhile decreased in percentage terms from 70% (1995) to 66% (mid-2001) while increasing its overall numbers by over 700 members. By comparison, healthcare employees make up around one percent of the union’s membership in the West. These figures show that the union’s membership is quite different in the Eastern region compared to the Western region. Although the construction industry continues to remain important especially in the West, it is a distant second in the East. This is a considerable change from the union’s first two decades when the construction industry workers made up a vast majority of the union’s represented employees. (Unpublished data provided by the CLAC to the author).

<sup>8</sup> Robert Laxer (1976). Canada’s Unions. Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, p.179-181.

Significantly, the Catholic labour movement was overseen by the Catholic clergy. This was done because within traditional Catholicism a layperson is always a member of the laity. He or she requires the oversight of the church's authorities even in non-ecclesiastical matters. By contrast, in Protestant circles the minister's authority is greatly reduced outside of the church community.

The influence of this conservative brand of Catholic unionism had, however, begun to wane by the time the CLAC had come into existence. The watershed incident for this was the Asbestos strike of 1949 which challenged the conservative attitude of the church toward industrial relations.<sup>9</sup> The militant strike of the workers against the mining corporation gained support from Québécois unionists and, critically, from the Catholic bishop of Montréal. It was during the following decade that the CTCC moved away from its Catholic roots, gradually shedding its religious character. By the end of the 1950s the CTCC was advancing a form of liberal humanism that was moving toward advocating a democratically socialist society. In 1960 they broke away completely from the tutelage of the Church.<sup>10</sup> It is interesting that just as the Catholic labour movement had begun to secularise and radicalise the CLAC would arrive on the Canadian labour relations scene.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the CLAC's founders were on the fringes of a labour movement that, due to the postwar boom and the successful industrial struggles of the 1940s, had been able to obtain significant gains in living standards, wages and benefits in the heavily unionised manufacturing and construction sectors. By the end of the 1960s, there had also been movement

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<sup>9</sup>Jacques Rouillard (1992[1987]) "Major changes in the Confédération des travailleurs catholiques du Canada, 1940-1960." reprinted in Laurel Sefton MacDowell and Ian Radforth (eds.) Canadian Working Class History: selected readings. Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press. p.651-672.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p.657-664.

in the public service sectors to win collective bargaining rights for its workers. All of these gains would be put at risk in the ensuing decades when a mixture of factors threatened the postwar prosperity of the Canadian workforce.

In the early 1970s, the threats to Canadian workers came from several directions. One, there had been continuing shifts in the international division of labour. Developing countries were becoming increasingly competitive for certain manufactured goods, thus resulting in job losses in certain industries in Canada. Two, with advances in computer technology much of Canadian industry was becoming more mechanised, leading to speed-ups and less need for a large workforce. In certain areas, automation came to replace jobs completely. Changes in the national and international economy also brought a period of “stagflation” where there was both a decrease in job creation and paradoxically a continuing increase in inflation. This situation decreased the buying power of workers and drove down the real value of wages. To counteract this development, Canadian workers grew increasingly militant. Illegal “wildcat” strikes became common and there was increasing militancy on the part of traditionally more compliant workers: postalworkers, women workers and public servants.<sup>11</sup>

These trends were opposed by government and business leaders through a variety of reforms aimed at restoring profitability to capitalist enterprises and ensuring a more docile workforce. The Liberal government of Pierre Trudeau introduced wage controls in the mid 1970s aimed at capping the wage increases of unionised workers. Social programmes were gradually

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<sup>11</sup>Craig Heron (1996). The History of the Canadian Labour Movement, 2nd ed. Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 87-100.

For a discussion of the struggles to unionise female dominated workplaces, including an opportunity to hear women in their own voices, see Carole Conde and Karl Beveridge (1986). First Contract: women and the fight to unionize. Toronto: Between the lines.

curtailed and dismantled starting in the late 1970s and early 1980s.<sup>12</sup> Concurrently, public service workers were increasingly having their right to strike and collectively bargain curtailed through reactionary provincial and federal legislation.<sup>13</sup>

Beyond this placing of unions on the defensive, there were increasing changes in the make-up of the workforce. The economy was quickly moving towards a service sector dominated economy. Blue-collar, factory jobs were increasingly being replaced with those in retail and other service sector areas. This changed workforce has also been a feminised one. Less than twenty percent of women were actively employed at the time of the 1911 census. Labour force participation grew to just under 40 percent by 1971 but grew to almost 58 percent by the early 1990s.<sup>14</sup> Many of these jobs are disproportionately located in part-time and female job ghettos that often lack benefits adequate pay or union protections. Attempts to unionise these workers have only obtained limited success.<sup>15</sup>

These changes to and within labour markets have presented a major challenge to the labour movement. Unions must find ways to organise and collectively bargain effective agreements for a part-time workforce in an increasingly perilous job market and economy. At the same time they face increasing pressures as a result of increasing automation and the competition

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<sup>12</sup>Bryan Palmer (1992) Working-class experience: rethinking the history of Canadian Labour, 1800-1991. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, Inc.

<sup>13</sup> Since the mid-1970s there has been an increasing resort by governments to back to work legislation for its employees. For an indepth discussion of this topic, including a list of such legislation by province, see Leo Panitch and Donald Swartz. (1993). The Assault on Trade Union Freedoms. Toronto: Garamond Press.

<sup>14</sup> Alicja Muszynski, "Social Stratification: Class and gender inequality" in B. Singh Bolaria (1995). Social Issues and Contradictions in Canadian Society. Toronto: Harcourt Brace. pp. 19-39.

<sup>15</sup>Ann Duffy and Norene Pupo (1992) Part-time Paradox: connecting gender, work and family. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc.

of foreign markets for its traditional blue collar workforce. These are larger social, economic and political issues. Answers to these problems need to be found outside the traditional methods of collective bargaining. However, the traditional political response -- voting for the New Democratic Party (NDP) -- is no longer an automatic answer to these difficulties as it has itself fallen on hard times.<sup>16</sup>

Like the labour movement as a whole, the CLAC confronts these changes and challenges. In doing so, it faces the added difficulties of being frequently raided by mainstream CLC and craft unions and attacked by critics on the political left. To date, however, no one has subjected the CLAC to a study aimed at assessing its viability as a trade union. This thesis attempts to address this paucity of information and analysis of the CLAC. It seeks to address the following issues and questions. In chapter two, I draw out the historical events that created the philosophy and social base that brought the CLAC into being. Looking briefly at the plural nature of Dutch society and the theological underpinnings of the Kuyperian worldview, I seek to draw a picture of a coherent Christian social philosophy. This social philosophy's understanding of labour relations, in certain respects, differs greatly from the experience of Canadian unionism and society. I also look at the process of post-war immigration from the Netherlands to Canada and try to explain why this encouraged the development of the CLAC as an alternative, albeit small, labour movement.

Next I look at the history of the foundation of the CLAC among recent immigrants to Canada in the early 1950s. The first two decades of the CLAC's history were tumultuous as the

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<sup>16</sup> The continuing discussions in Canadian Dimension and other leftist organs point to the extent of this crisis. The reasons for this crisis on the parliamentary left fall well outside the scope of this study. For an accessible introduction to this crisis in the Canadian context see James Laxer (1996). In search of a new left: Canadian politics after the neo-conservative assault. Toronto: Penguin Books.

union's leaders struggled for survival in the face of court challenges and conflicts with other unions. Finally I discuss issues related to the union's recent history and the union's hopes for the future.

In chapter three I delineate the union's distinctive understanding of unionism. The CLAC has seen itself as representing an alternative to mainstream craft and CLC labour unions. I begin with an examination of the union's handling of the Univision Marketing organising drive and the negotiations for a first contract at the company in the late 1990s. I try to show the difficulties that the union faced in trying to organise this firm. I study and offer a critique of the left-wing press' criticism of how the CLAC handled this particular case.

Much of my discussion of the CLAC centres around its representation of workers in the construction industry. These issues were chosen because of several factors. During its early years the CLAC was primarily a construction union. Although other industries have come to displace construction as the single area of representation, it remains an important sector for the union. In recent years the construction industry has been increasingly affected by modularisation and other forms of de-skilling which have benefitted the workers that the CLAC represents. The CLAC's represents various types of labourers who have been able to obtain skills that they can use to do various semi-skilled jobs formerly done by skilled tradesmen. This has led to an increasing number of jurisdictional disputes with craft unions in the building trades. These struggles with the craft unions and the issues that they highlight have been emphasized both in the interviews and consequently in the report.

This discussion is followed by a critical evaluation of the union's various stances. In particular, I look at the union's position against striking, its belief in the utmost importance of



“freedom of association”, its industrial policy of organising in the construction industry, and finally, the union’s belief in the importance of a “community of work life” within this industry.

In the concluding chapter, I break down the question of the union’s effectiveness into three major issues. One issue is the union’s overall effectiveness as a bargaining agent. This was a particularly difficult question to answer. I present several important empirical questions that, if answered in future studies, may bring an answer to the controversy surrounding the union’s effectiveness at representing its members. Secondly, I examine the union’s ideology. Particularly intriguing is CLAC’s conservative belief in the policy of *equal pay for equal work* (versus the more radical demand of *equal pay for work of equal value*). Next, I critique the union’s declared position on non-partisan unionism. I argue that union support for progressive causes and politics is essential for the defense of working class rights both in the workplace and in the wider society. In addition, there is a discussion of how the union’s otherwise conservative stance may actually allow it to be involved in areas that other unions would fear to tread. Here, I specifically address the discussion of the union’s involvement in Evangelical Christian schools.

Finally, there is an examination of two critiques that the CLAC has launched against so-called mainstream unions: the use of the strike weapon and union democracy. I take up the CLAC argument that many strikes arise from union leaders cajoling the workers and the use of undemocratic bargaining committee practices. Looking at both the recent history of labour militancy in the 1970s, and Bryan Palmer’s neo-Trotskyist critique of union bureaucracy, I argue that use of the “strike weapon” is often more a mark of dignity and democracy on behalf of the worker than the creation of angry bureaucrats.

The CLAC makes a great deal about the need for democracy and control in the

workplace. They argue that in other unions, workers are not in control of their destiny. This is seen through CLC unions' support of various progressive causes (such as pay equity and homosexual rights) and the financial support of the NDP in the face of the membership's marked conservatism. Although there are some merits to this argument, this begs the question of the CLAC's own democratic pedigree. By examining the constitution of the union I attempt to ask to what degree this union operates in a democratic manner, at least on paper. The conclusion on this manner is decidedly mixed.

I conclude that the CLAC offers an interesting departure from standard English Canadian unionism. However, this departure is fraught with dangers and could be very detrimental to the Canadian working-class as a whole if this form of representation was more wide spread than at present.

## CHAPTER TWO -- The CLAC: An Historical Analysis<sup>17</sup>

The development of a movement in society, even one of a relatively modest following, is by necessity steeped in and conditioned by the culture and times in which it arises. This rather pedestrian truism was summed up aptly by Antonio Gramsci who believed that movements and political parties needed to learn “from the facts [of struggle] that nothing that exists is natural but rather exists because of the existence of certain conditions, whose disappearance cannot remain without consequences.”<sup>18</sup> Any study of a labour union must, then, take into account the broader context of industrial relations and class struggle on a continent wide level. The history of this struggle, its victories, defeats and compromises would have some degree of effect on an industry, regional or even bi-national level. For example, the famous 1937 recognition strike in Oshawa, Ontario, must be remembered in the wider context of the emerging North American industrial unionism of the Committee for Industrial Organisation (CIO) in the United States.<sup>19</sup> To decontextualise such an important event would be disingenuous to the strikers of 1937.

An understanding of the wider context becomes especially important in the case of the CLAC for the industrial relations and social milieu in which its philosophy developed were

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<sup>17</sup>There has been a paucity of secondary sources on the history of the CLAC. Because of this I have primarily relied on the semi-structured interviews that I conducted with CLAC representatives, publications from the union including The Guide a monthly magazine published from the union’s inception and some of the more extensive secondary literature that deals with the process of postwar Dutch immigration to Canada.

<sup>18</sup> Antonio Gramsci (1992). The Prison Notebooks. New York: International Publishers. p.158.

<sup>19</sup> See Irving Abella “Oshawa, 1937” in Irving Abella (ed.) On Strike.

Bryan Palmer (1992) Working-class experience: rethinking the history of Canadian Labour, 1800-1991. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, Inc., 214-267.

markedly different than the Canadian situation. CLAC research director, Gideon Strauss<sup>20</sup> has referred to the union as being like a flower, or maybe more accurately a tulip, transplanted from its native soil to a foreign environment. It is therefore important to discuss the key differences which existed within the society and unionism of the Netherlands that would be imported by Dutch workers as they started to immigrate to Canada in the late 1940s. The two most important differences for the present study are the unique plural nature of Dutch society and the ideological nature of unions within the Netherlands.

Pluralism is an essential part of the configuration of Dutch civil society. Since the early nineteenth century, the Netherlands has been divided along pluralistic lines into what are referred to in the Netherlands as “pillars” and “pillarisation”. Pillars within Dutch life have been maintained until today (although in recent years their influence has waned). The main pillars were those of the Dutch Reformed Church (*Hervormde Kerk*), the state church in the Netherlands since 1826. This church tended to be much more theologically and socially liberal. Then there was the so-called *Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland* which consisted of more conservative elements within the Reformed community. These had broken away from the state church in the mid to late nineteenth century after a religious reawakening had spread across the Dutch Kingdom and the German states.<sup>21</sup> There was a Roman Catholic pillar, and finally, there developed a non-confessional pillar that consisted of a variety of socialists, secular liberals and others without strong sectarian commitments. The significance of these pillars for everyday Dutch life cannot be

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<sup>20</sup>Gideon Strauss is the second and present research director for the CLAC. He was interviewed for this study. For more biographical information on him, please see the appendix.

<sup>21</sup> For an outline of the rather complex splits and theological divisions among the reformed churches in the Netherlands see the introduction at [www.reformed.net](http://www.reformed.net). (<http://reformed.net/church/timeline.shtml>)

underestimated. Gideon Strauss explained their significance. He stated that:

In the Dutch setting there had been a long history of the organisation of society along pluralistic lines based on diverse basic commitments, if you want to you could call those religious commitments but this meant that the Netherlands was shaped in terms of “pillars” -- the term that people normally use. So there would have been a Catholic pillar, a Reformed pillar and a secular pillar which would have had both a liberal and socialist component. So, in these pillars you could live your entire life. You could go to... a Reformed church, you could go to a Reformed school, your family habits would be deeply shaped by the Reformed worldview and you could belong to a Christian trade union, or more specifically a Reformed trade union, you could go to a Reformed university if you are so inclined and so forth. All of your social interactions other than with the state itself would be in a reformed bubble or pillar. Even your interaction with the state itself would be mediated through the Anti-Revolutionary Party which was the Reformed party of the time. So when these Dutch immigrants came [to Canada] their view of society was deeply shaped by this experience of religious pluralism. For them this was the natural way of doing things. It was just what one did.<sup>22</sup>

This type of social organisation naturally created deep ideological commitments that were highly resistant to change. Even in the 1990s it was common for older Dutch people in the Netherlands, especially in rural areas, not to have friends or associates outside their particular pillar.<sup>23</sup>

The 1940s was a difficult decade for the Dutch people. From May 1940 until 1943-44 the Netherlands was under the occupation of Nazi-Germany. By 1944 the war was especially harrowing with malnutrition, disease and starvation rampant through the north of the country. (The southern Netherlands was by that time occupied by Canadian soldiers).<sup>24</sup> The onset of peace

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<sup>22</sup> Author Interview with Gideon Strauss.

<sup>23</sup> Paul Dekker and Peter Ester (1990). “Ideological Identification and (de)pillarisation in the Netherlands”. *Netherlands Journal of the Social Sciences*, 26:2, p.168-188.

<sup>24</sup> There are numerous excellent studies of the Netherlands under Nazi-German occupation in the English language. In particular the studies by Walter B. Maas. (1970) *The Netherlands at War: 1940-1945*. Toronto: Abelard-Schuman. and by Werner Warmbrunn. (1963) *The Dutch under German Occupation : 1940-1945*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press. are good starting points for any study of this rather harrowing period of modern Dutch history.

brought its own problems for the Dutch state. Like many European countries the economy was in tatters, essential goods were being rationed and the country was facing an acute crisis of overpopulation. The government dealt with the last of these problems by encouraging its citizens to emigrate abroad to seek new opportunities. Canada became one of the most popular destinations for immigrants from the Netherlands in this period. This was caused by numerous factors ranging from the historical ties between the two countries from the war, the proximity of North America to Europe and the encouragement of Christian Reformed emigration societies that had already seen the beginnings of strong Reformed communities in Alberta, British Columbia, Ontario and Michigan.<sup>25</sup>

The immigrants that arrived from the Netherlands were a cross section of the population. However, there were a disproportionate number of families and individuals immigrating who were from the more conservative Reformed churches. There were several historical and demographic reasons for why this occurred. First, the Roman Catholic church in the Netherlands did its best to discourage immigration to Canada as it saw it as a Protestant country and the support network for Dutch Catholics was more advanced in Australia. Secondly, the problem of overpopulation was most acute in the countryside where the population was disproportionately members of the more conservative Reformed churches.<sup>26</sup> When the immigrants arrived in Canada their religious commitments were also to be reflected in how they responded to their new country.

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<sup>25</sup> Joanne Van Dijk (2001). "The Role of Religion in the Postwar Settlement Patterns of Dutch Canadians" Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology. 38:1:57-66.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

When Dutch Roman Catholics and less committed Protestants moved to Canada they tended to readily assimilate into the surrounding culture. The Catholic clergy felt it would be most healthy to incorporate the newly arrived Dutch into non-Dutch congregations. But when the Reformed Dutch members arrived in Canada they found little about the theological foundations of the Anglo-Saxon churches that resembled those that they had left behind in the Netherlands. Furthermore, Dutch Reformed Protestants tended to settle in areas where kinfolk and townfolk had settled from back home. These individuals tended to have religious affinities with each other and come from similar denominational backgrounds. By the late 1950s the new immigrants were able to reassemble the denominational structure of the Netherlands. The Christian Reformed Church (the CRC) was the largest of these but other groups such as the Netherlands Reformed Church, the Canadian Reformed Church and the Orthodox Reformed Church were formed to be parallel organisations to those in the Netherlands. Moreover, the Dutch immigrants also set up a large array of organisations and societies that in number and breath were exceptional to many other immigrant groups at the time. The Dutch Reformed Christians founded among others credit unions (most notably DUCA), a Christian political party, two trade unions (CLAC and the Christian Trade Unions of Canada (CTUC) ), an extensive collection of Reformed elementary schools, several University level educational institutes (in Ontario these included Redeemer College in Ancaster and the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto, while in British Columbia there were Trinity Western University in Langley and Regent College in Vancouver), a social justice organisation (the Committee for Justice and Liberty which later became Citizens for Public Justice which is based in Toronto), while various cooperatives, newspapers and community groups spread across the country. In addition to this was the equally

impressive feat of Grand Rapids, Michigan with its college, seminary and Christian publishing empire (notably Eerdmans and Zondervan).<sup>27</sup> The question may arise as to why the Dutch Calvinists have been so prolific in giving birth to organisations during their early years as immigrants to Canada. The answer to this should be sought in the theology of the Reformed churches as it was taught within Calvinist circles in the Netherlands and how this was imported to the Canadian situation.

The particular theological interpretation that became popular within Dutch Reformed circles was what is known as neo-Calvinism. It is based upon the thought of a famous Dutch theologian named Abraham Kuyper. He was no ordinary pastor. Combining a life as a congregational minister, theologian, author, co-founder of a leading political party (the Anti-Revolutionary Party), prime minister of the Netherlands, and founder of what later became a leading university (Free University of Amsterdam), he was a man who believed fervently that the Christian believer's place was in the world taking part in the debates in the public sphere. Further, the Christian should participate not only within the bourgeois secular institutions of the day, but needed to take part in creating alternative formations that were formed on an explicitly Christian basis. This was a radical departure from what some traditional Calvinists felt about the Christian's place in the world. According to this more traditional view the elect should not sully himself with the damned. That the world was so full of corrupt influences that the Christian had no place to play in its affairs. In response, Kuyper held forth a doctrine referred to as "common grace". In it he stated that God blessed not only the elect (who received "saving grace") but also

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid. Also see the various Reformed organisations linked from the main webpage at <http://reformed.net/>.



gave forth his blessings to all people. Hence the rain fell and the sun shone on both the good and the wicked. Since the Lord God's blessings were therefore present in all areas of life it was the believer's responsibility to be the salt of the earth in all areas of the public sphere. The Christian does not only have a calling within the church but "also has a calling in the midst of the life of this world".<sup>28</sup> It is the purpose of the Christian to take part in the reformation of society into the image that the Creator has intended and to constantly challenge those deformations that have been instituted by fallen humankind in his delusion of self-sufficiency. This reformation should not be simply held to the institutional church but must also apply to politics and to the wider society.<sup>29</sup> But in order to affect such a reformation of society it is necessary to form organisations along a Christian basis where the values of the gospel are held paramount. As Joseph Gritter has stated, "there are certain areas of life in which the spiritual, ethical and moral differences between the way of life of the world and that of a Christian are so pronounced, cut so deeply, that organization on a Christian basis is absolutely necessary."<sup>30</sup> It was in this understanding of a Christian's place in the affairs of this world that encouraged members of the Christian Reformed Churches to press forward with a Kuyperian agenda of social engagement.

As discussed above, the Dutch plural model of society consisted of several pillars that were important elements in the production of a more or less ideologically consistent way of life.

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<sup>28</sup> Kuyper quoted in Skillen and McCarthy 1991:400.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. 393-405.

<sup>30</sup> Joseph Gritter in the Banner, 5 January 1951:29 quoted by Van Dijk 2001:65. Mr. Joseph Gritter was the head of the Michigan based Christian Labor Association of America during the 1950s and 1960s. He played an important role in the founding of the CLAC giving advice and encouragement to the members, helping write the organisation's constitution, speaking at early national conventions and by maintaining personal ties with Gerald Vandezande and others who were instrumental in the CLAC's survival.

One of the aspects of this system for the Reformed members was the existence of a Reformed Trade union movement that originally came into being in the 1870s as an organisation known as Patrimonium. This gradually grew into a Dutch Christian trade union federation known as the National Federation of Christian Trade Unions (CNV).<sup>31</sup> “For immigrants from the Netherlands to Canada the notion of a Christian trade union was nothing exceptional or new.”<sup>32</sup> When Dutch immigrants arrived in Canada and started to obtain jobs in unionised workplaces many were to become uncomfortable with the way Canadian trade unionism operated.

Gideon Strauss believes that the process that was to bring the CLAC into existence in 1952 consisted of two intertwined factors. On the one hand, there were the unschooled workers in the factories and worksites, and, on the other hand, there were the ministers within the Reformed churches in Canada. He explains this interaction as such:

Probably the early organisers of CLAC in Canada would have been a combination of ordinary working folk who were required to join existing trade unions to be able to have access to work in specific workplaces and when reading the documentation from these trade unions would have felt themselves uncomfortable because of a sense of dissonance of their own most deeply held convictions and the stated basic principles of these trade unions. This would not have been so much an intellectual or a theoretical response as a carpenter or whatever saying I can't do this. Because of some basic religious sense of incompatibility of basic principles. At the same time many of the ministers who were often called from Dutch churches called to the newly formed Christian Reformed congregations in Canada. They would be advocating for Christian organisation along Kuyperian lines. These were deeply held convictions for them. Arguing that it is the responsibility of Reformed Christians to engage with every area of life and it was

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<sup>31</sup> The CNV played an important role in the early history of the CLAC. It provided some of the initial funding for the CLAC. This included the sponsorship of Frans Fuykschot during his early work in Canada. The CNV switched its support after 1958 to the Christian Trade Unions of Canada (CTUC) much to the dismay of the leaders of the CLAC. (Ed Grootenboer, *The Guide* September / October 2001, p.15). Since 1958 the CNV has continued to give support in a less official capacity to the CLAC with the friendships and later fraternal delegations sent between the federation and the CLAC.

<sup>32</sup> Author Interview with Gideon Strauss.

imperative of them to do this through organisations rather than as lone individuals.<sup>33</sup>

One becomes quickly aware of the main issues troubling the workers. The constitutions of certain unions at the time openly discussed the need for “class struggle” or “class warfare” against the bosses of capitalism. Furthermore, many of the CLC unions in the following years would come out in support of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation party (CCF) and later the New Democratic Party (NDP), a party that many felt was clearly Socialist and even communistic. Such wording and stances were deeply troubling to these deeply religious and Calvinist workers.<sup>34</sup>

They hit them on several levels. On a purely national level, they went against the grain of Dutch industrial relations which was built more on a model of discussion and consultation rather than militant clashes (a factor that would be later pointed to by economists as a key reason for the Netherlands post-war success). It is important to also remember that the Netherlands borders Germany, a country that was then partly under Soviet occupation. In North America there was deep anxiety about the Communist threat. Marxism had traditionally been hostile to Christian believers and the idea of giving one’s livelihood to an organisation that one considered Marxist seemed to many recent immigrants a form of apostasy. Finally, the Dutch trade unions did not force individuals to join or support the unions financially. This membership was strictly voluntary. Yet, in Canada membership was at the time a precondition for employment or at the very least

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<sup>33</sup> Author interview with Gideon Strauss.

<sup>34</sup> Arguably Christ himself and the early church could be seen as socialist in their intent. As the Bible says of the early disciples “All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as had need” (Acts of the Apostles, 2:44-45, New International Version). Private property did not exist in the earliest church. The socialist tradition in Christianity has been continued in modern times through liberation theology and other such attempts to fuse communist and Christian insights. For more on this theme see the special number of Monthly Review 36:3 July-August 1984 “Religion and the Left”.

promotion in the construction industry. One of the earliest members and first research director of the CLAC, Harry Antonides, tells of his experiences being denied promotion and dismissed from an apprenticeship as a millwright at the Dow Chemical Company of Sarnia because of his belief that the union's stances on numerous issues violated his religious conscience and commitments.<sup>35</sup> Such experiences were to lead to numerous like-minded Dutch Calvinists to come together in the early 1950s to form an alternative labour movement.

The foundation of the Christian Labour Association of Canada took place at a meeting held on February 20, 1952 in Ontario.<sup>36</sup> At the meeting an executive committee was appointed and four locals were created to serve the communities of Aylmer, Hamilton, Sarnia and St.Catharines. The first meeting itself had been the result of many small discussions held across the province and in British Columbia in the previous year. In its early years the union would be maintained through the efforts and dues of its general membership (that is members not actually serviced by the union in collective agreements but who benefitted through the publications, lectures and meetings held by it).<sup>37</sup>

It was not until 1954 that the union made its first attempt at unionising an Ontario workplace. The construction firm of Bosch and Keuning in Hamilton, Ontario was organised by

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<sup>35</sup>Interview with Harry Antonides in The Guide, January 1999.

<sup>36</sup>The sources that discuss this matter were written several years after this event took place. Not one of these list the specific location of the meeting. Outside the four communities mentioned in this paragraph the CLAC also frequently held meetings in its early years in Weston, Ontario. It would seem most probable that the first meeting would have been held in one of these towns.

<sup>37</sup>Further these sources of support continued to be a larger share of the union's revenue than its serviced members' dues well into the 1980s. (Author interview with Gideon Strauss). This is probably one of the most unique parts of the CLAC's history. Instead of surviving on the dues of union members, it survived through the charity and partnership of "non-serviced" subscribers who believed in the union's goals and purposes.

the CLAC and they then sought certification before of the Ontario Labour Relations Board (OLRB). At the hearing called by the OLRB, the union's secretary, Mr. Frans Fuykschot, was asked about the union's inclusiveness of workers with religious commitments other than Christian. Specifically, he was asked, would a Mohammedan be accepted into the CLAC's ranks? His negative response would haunt the union for the next nine years. The most charitable explanation for his answer was that he had misunderstood the question. Fuykschot had believed that a Mohammedan could not in good conscience join the CLAC as a Christian organisation. Yet, of course, the OLRB wanted to know whether the union would allow a Mohammedan to join, not whether such a person would feel comfortable joining. Because of this response the OLRB rejected the request for certification and thereby declared that the union not be recognised as a bona fide trade union. Because of this ruling the British Columbian Labour Relations Board reversed a previous decision to certify a workplace in that province.<sup>38</sup>

The CLAC spent the next three years trying to reverse this decision. It existed during this period through the representation of workplaces on a voluntary recognition basis. In 1957, Frans Fuykschot appeared once again before the Board and this time answered more acceptably that the union, in the light of Christian principles, would not discriminate on the basis of race, creed or place of national origin as demanded by the Labour Code. The OLRB however felt that this was not enough, stating that there needed to be religious neutrality within the union and its constitution.

At this point the CLAC's legal counsel advised that the biblical basis for the union be dropped from the constitution along with the requirement that union meetings begin with

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<sup>38</sup> The Guide, May 1967:24-25.

Scripture reading and prayer. Mr. Fuykschot and the majority of the National Executive Committee agreed to this proposal and it was brought forward to the delegates at the 1958 national convention. There was a furious discussion and a clear split along generational lines. The older men in the union were mostly supportive of the compromise solution arguing that in order to run a Christian union one does not necessarily require an explicitly Christian constitution. Meanwhile, the younger members<sup>39</sup> (many of whom were in their twenties at the time) saw the issue as non-negotiable and managed to defeat the motion.<sup>40</sup>

The failure of this motion to pass led to a split within the union. Hamilton members led by Frans Fuykschot and several members of the National Executive Committee broke away from the CLAC to form the Christian Trade Unions of Canada (CTUC). This group altered the constitution as had been suggested and promptly received OLRB certification.

The newly formed CTUC, however, had made a miscalculation that would later prove fatal to the organisation. While taking some of the senior leaders such as Fuykschot out of the CLAC it had left behind many of the younger members. Many of these members were more zealous and ideologically attached to the Kuyprian project. They would become the leaders that would guide the CLAC through its infancy and they played an important role in the union during the following four decades. In fact, the CTUC never grew beyond its Hamilton base and by 1978 when it rejoined the CLAC it had around 350 members in total.

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<sup>39</sup> It has been suggested that one would expect the opposite generational alignment due to the more liberal nature of youth vis-a-vis their elders. However, I feel from reading the documents from this period, as well as my interview with Gerald Vandezande, that one gets the sense of a very idealistic group of young men who were very zealous for implementing this view of unionism. And idealism is traditionally as associated with youthfulness as is liberality.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. p.25.

The leadership of the CLAC now fell to the younger members specifically, Harry Antonides,<sup>41</sup> Gerald Vandezande<sup>42</sup> and Hank Kuntz.<sup>43</sup> They actively sought help from sympathetic lawyers and once again sought recognition. In 1960, the CLAC attempted to organise the Tange Construction Company of Trenton, Ontario and a request for certification was brought to the OLRB. The decision of the Board took an unusually long year and a half to be rendered. Once again the OLRB ruled that the CLAC would not be certified because of its lack of religious neutrality. They added that although there was no proof that the CLAC had ever discriminated against its members on the basis of creed, it may do so in the future. The OLRB demanded that the CLAC prove that it would not discriminate in future. This bizarre demand, which clearly violated all accepted norms of jurisprudence<sup>44</sup>, convinced many in the union's leadership that it was the religious nature of the union that was offensive to the board and not any

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<sup>41</sup> Harry Antonides joined the CLAC around the time of its inception. He served in various official capacities in the union during the 1950s. In 1962 he was hired as the union's second representative and moved in 1964 to Western Canada to organise union locals there. From 1970, until his retirement at the end of 1997, Antonides served as the research and education director for the union. He was a prolific writer producing countless books and articles which attempted to explain and defend the union's philosophy (The Guide, June 1999).

<sup>42</sup> Gerald Vandezande became involved with the CLAC in his late teens in the early 1950s. He was instrumental in maintaining the union's explicit Christian principles at the 1958 convention. In 1961, he went on to become the first paid and full time business agent. From 1966 until 1972 he was executive secretary of the CLAC. He helped publicize the CLAC's brand of unionism through the Guide, various newspaper articles, radio addresses and speeches across the country. In 1972 he went on to help found the Citizens for Public Justice for which he received the Order of Canada (Gideon Strauss and Janice van Bolhuis, The Guide, January/February/March 2002:15).

<sup>43</sup> Hank Kuntz dedicated over forty-three years to the CLAC. Hank joined the CLAC in 1954. He served as President of the National Board from 1958 to 1977. He was an important member of the group that steered the union after the split with the CTUC. In 1977 he was hired by the union as a field representative. He served in this position until his retirement in 1997. (Chris Bosch, The Guide, November/December 2001:15).

<sup>44</sup> It is a widely accepted legal principle that individuals must be judged by actions they have carried out. To judge an individual or corporation for an action that they may take in future flies in the face of this. It was for this reason that Chief Justice McRuer would later reject the OLRB counsel's argument that Fuykschot's 1954 testimony proved that the CLAC may discriminate (see The Guide, 11:4:1, April 1963).

particular action undertaken by the organisation itself. The only response was to challenge this decision. The union decided to bring the OLRB to the Ontario Supreme Court.

The case was brought before the Supreme Court of Ontario on 25 March 1963. The defense of the Board's position rested on the opinion that unions, as secular institutions, required a degree of religious neutrality. This was required to ensure that the members of a union were not forced to endure the situation of a religiously tilted union when the substantive issues at stake on the job were almost always of a non-religious nature. The CLAC's counsel, Mr. B. J. McKinnon, QC, defended the union's position by declaring that secularism itself was a no less biased view and religiously un-neutral one than that of the CLAC.<sup>45</sup> Gerald Vandezande was at the trial and remembers very vividly the exchange that changed the course of debate on this issue.

As I recall, the argument initially before the court was, is there such a thing as neutrality? And I distinctly remember Mr. McKinnon making a very broad, eloquent, persuasive argument that there is no such thing as neutrality and that even the believers in neutrality are believers, namely in neutrality. And so he did a fabulous job challenging the opposition lawyer [Mr. Sedgwick, QC] who acted on behalf of the OLRB and as a result persuaded Mr. McRuer that the question of neutrality was at the heart of this thing and that an organisation such as CLAC should be recognised in a democratic, pluralistic society such as ours and that its commitment to Christian social principles in no way discriminated against other people of other faiths who might or might not be Christian. And then Mr. Justice McRuer exclaimed "Of course there is no such thing as neutrality!" And then he tested the lawyer for the OLRB and asked him the question: 'Do you think that anyone can be neutral with respect to the Conservative Party of Ontario?' and this gentleman for the OLRB was a bagman for the Conservative party, 'No, my Lord, nobody

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<sup>45</sup> This arises out of a much longer debate within secular and religious circles over the basis of secularism versus a religious worldview. Bob Goudzwaard, an economist from the Erasmus University in Rotterdam and an early supporter of the CLAC, has written in this vein when he has argued that the debates over Socialism, the welfare state, technology, security, nationalism and the like are every much as ideological as they are idolatrous. Christians are required to place their hope in God and not in the hollow images made by humankind's hands (Goudzwaard, 1981). In a similar way, George Steiner wrote eloquently about the attempt many have made to replace faith in a supreme deity with other (secular) ways of making sense of the world that may indeed be no less based on belief than the idols they displaced (see Steiner, 1974).



can be neutral'.<sup>46</sup>

CLAC's legal counsel furthered the neutrality argument via reference to statements by union leaders and assorted union documents. Mr. McKinnon made an effort to show that these unions desired adherence by their membership to a belief in class struggle. The constitution of the International Association of Machinists (1961) was quoted as saying that "...those who toil should use their rights of citizenship intelligently through organizations founded upon the *class struggle*."<sup>47</sup> Another argument was based on a statement by the then leader of the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) that communists were unwelcome in OFL unions. McKinnon argued that this was clearly not neutral in its intent. If the Board's argument was taken to its logical conclusion, unions who were un-welcoming of Communists or those who demanded adherence to class struggle should be decertified. McKinnon argued:

This only serves to emphasize that Unions do take positions on matters of creedal beliefs to which their entire membership certainly cannot subscribe but that has not prevented them being certified by the Ontario Labour Relations Board. Unions certainly do not exist in antiseptic vacuums and the views supported by the present applicant are much more universally understood, accepted, and indeed recognized by our law than [those of some other unions].<sup>48</sup>

The CLAC's counsel further argued that it seemed permissible for a unionist to be supportive of a philosophy that promoted disharmony and tumult. Yet it was not permitted that one promotes harmony and justice through the application of Christian principles to the workplace. It seemed that this would be an unjust and unequal application of the law. McKinnon asked why it was that

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<sup>46</sup> Author interview with Gerald Vandezande.

<sup>47</sup> The Guide, 11:4:1, April 1963, emphasis in the original.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

some unions in Canada could openly support socialist alternatives but not Christian ones?

The religious argument was made fairly straightforward. The Dominion of Canada was founded upon explicitly Christian principles. God was mentioned numerous times in important national documents. Most notably, His name came up in the constitution (the British North America Act (BNA), 1867) and in the country's three unofficial national anthems.<sup>49</sup> With this rationale, Mr. McKinnon critiqued the argument of the OLRB that religious neutrality was necessary. An argument was made that the BNA itself did not recognise religious neutrality. Therefore, how could the OLRB demand religious neutrality from the CLAC when its own powers arose from the BNA which offered a theistic interpretation of the world?

On May 2, 1963, Mr. Chief Justice J. C. McRuer delivered a judgment quashing the refusal of the OLRB to certify the CLAC. In his judgment, he stated that the OLRB had erred in several respects in its interpretation of the law. In particular, the OLRB had unfairly placed a "heavy onus" on the CLAC to prove it would not be discriminatory in the future. It based its argument on the evidence given by Mr. Frans Fuykschot before the OLRB in 1954 and subsequent testimony given in 1958. McRuer ruled that this would open any union to be completely discredited by the careless words of a single officer. He also stated that the demand of the OLRB that the union not start its meetings with Scripture and prayer was a poor application of the law. In his judgement, he reminded the parties that the session of the legislature that passed the Labour Relations Act began with prayer. The Chief Justice interpreted the law regarding discrimination as circumscribed. There was nothing in the law that demanded that unions not

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<sup>49</sup> Canada's national anthems in the 1960s were God Save the Queen, O Canada ("Ruler Supreme, who nearest humble prayer/ Hold our dominion in Thy loving care.") as well as the imperially triumphant Maple Leaf Forever ("God save our Queen, and Heaven bless / The Maple Leaf forever").

discriminate. The way that the law was written, unions were forbidden from “discriminat[ing] against any person because of his creed”. He stated that,

If I supported the Board’s refusal to certify the union based on the ground that its members engaged in prayer, read passages from the Bible and sing psalms and hymns at their meetings, the result would be that a union that required no standards of ethical or moral conduct and opened its meetings by reading from Karl Marx and singing the Red International might be certified but the one that permits the practices here in question could not be. I do not think that this was the intention of the Legislature nor do I think that the express terms of the relevant statutes prevent union[s] from engaging in devotional exercises of the character set out in the Constitution of the applicant from being certified.”<sup>50</sup>

With this decision, the nine year struggle for official recognition with the government ended successfully. The union’s leadership had refused to back down or part with the principles they thought were of great importance. Indeed, they had finally succeeded in winning certification without being forced to change the constitution or the Christian nature of the organisation. However, this victory would prove to be just the first legal hurdle that the CLAC had to address. The next challenge to the union’s rights to representing workers would come from the craft unions in the construction industry.

The union’s history has been marked throughout with bitter rivalries between itself and other unions. The struggle has been both ideologically based and also of a jurisdictional nature. The union’s traditional base of membership has been in the construction industry. These construction jobs were often entry-level and attracted Dutch immigrant workers of an evangelical background. It was workers of such a background that the union often attracted to its ranks. Following the union’s victory in the Supreme Court of Ontario, conflicts began to arise with other

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<sup>50</sup>The Guide, 11:5:1, May 1963.

unions. Harry Antonides recalls one early conflict in British Columbia. Says Antonides,

We had a lot of skirmishes in those days. Their reps would go to our members and criticize CLAC. I remember in Houston[, B.C.] they told our members that if you don't join us now, you won't have a job eventually because we will take over from the CLAC anyway. Then you'll have to join us. ...I was in Houston and I knew [the other union's representatives] were in town. Houston was a small place with one major thoroughfare and you could pretty well keep track of the traffic. If you knew where someone was staying, you'd know what he's up to. One time I put on a hat and glasses as a disguise and left town, heading towards Burns Lake. I kept my eye on the rear view mirror and, sure enough, before too long I saw them behind me.... I got so mad [because they were following me] that I pulled over and waved them down. I said, "I know what you guys are up to. What you are doing is illegal. You have no right to do this watching and besetting." ...The other union had us out-gunned, out-maneuvred, and out-manned. Eventually we lost the situation there.<sup>51</sup>

Such stories are reminders that from the beginning, relations between the CLAC and other unions were never good. Much of this conflict has arisen from the particular form of unionisation the CLAC has undertaken within the construction industry. The CLAC is an industrial, wall-to-wall style union. Below I will discuss the merits of this way of organising, but, for now, it is important to realise that the union has always "cut across everyone's field" causing jurisdictional disputes with most construction craft unions.<sup>52</sup> Other unions in the construction industry did not want this kind of competition. This was especially so with the CLAC's perceived conservative Christian and anti-Communist, anti-Socialist leanings. This friction came to a head in Chatham, Ontario.

In May 1965, CLAC members employed by Sass Manufacturing arrived to work on the elevator shafts at the construction site of the new Union Gas head office in Chatham, Ontario.

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<sup>51</sup> "There is a better way" interview with Harry Antonides, The Guide, January /February 1998:4-7.

<sup>52</sup> Author interview with Ed Grootenboer.

The business agents for the Labourers International Union of North America (LIUNA) Local # 625, Teamsters Local # 880 and the Carpenters and Joiners of America (Carpenters) Local # 494 staged an illegal walkout, refusing to work as long as the Sass Manufacturing workers were at the site. The end result was that the general contractor for the project cancelled the contract with Sass. According to The Guide, there were also “dictatorial attempts [by other unions] to interfere with CLAC’s certification rights” in the ensuing weeks.<sup>53</sup> The CLAC realised that it had to challenge the international locals in order to ensure that its workers would be allowed to labour on construction sites not only in the Windsor-Chatham area but also throughout the province. Thus, the union once again headed to the Supreme Court of Ontario. This time they requested that the court issue an injunction prohibiting the international unions, their agents and members, from interfering with the tasks of the local CLAC’s members. The case went to court on the morning of 30 April 1968. The arguments were mostly focused on a technical issue: Did the CLAC representative, Gerald Vandezande have the appropriate standing to sue the international locals? Mr Justice Courtwright Wells, the justice hearing the case, decided to reserve judgement on this technical matter until the following morning.<sup>54</sup> Before the case was to begin on 1 May, Sidney L. Robins, QC., the counsel for the Windsor Building Trades Council, approached CLAC counsel Mr. McKinnon to reach a settlement. It was decided that both parties would agree to an

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<sup>53</sup> “Rather fight than switch” by Gerald Vandezande. The Guide, May / June 1968:20. Also see the accompanying article: “CLAC scores Supreme Court victory” by Gerald Vandezande, The Guide, May / June 1968:1-2. It seems as though, of the unions who staged the walkout, only the Carpenters and Labourers continued the court action. However, this may just be a discrepancy in the report itself.

<sup>54</sup> The argument had been made by the Building Trades counsel that Vandezande was not legally permitted to sue on behalf of the CLAC local, the Chatham Construction Workers Association, local 53 (CLAC, local 53). The CLAC counsel, B. J. McKinnon, QC., countered that this assertion was not supportable “either in law or in logic” and that the suit had been filed in order to protect the infringement of the workers’ legally entitled rights in law to earn a living. Ibid.:2.

injunction issued by the court, prohibiting illegal industrial action against the CLAC in the future. The Judge said that he was pleased that the parties had come to a settlement on their own accord and remarked on the injunction's special appropriateness for May Day. Although the judgment specifically affected the immediate counties around Windsor and Chatham (Lambton and Essex) it had wider implications. According to Vandezande, this injunction allowed the union to operate unmolested across the province and nation as the other craft unions realised that the CLAC had a legal precedent upholding its place on the job site.<sup>55</sup>

The court victory brought to an end the period in which the union's struggle for survival was paramount. The next three decades were by no means as tumultuous with fewer court cases and no longer any need to appear before Chief Justices to protect the very survival of the union. The following years saw several developments that can be covered in relatively broad strokes.

In the early 1970s the union began to diversify beyond its early reliance on the construction industry and began to organise in the health care industry. Many of these workplaces at the time were non-unionised and suffered from paltry wages and poor working conditions. Many of those interviewed saw this as a logical extension of the union's philosophy.<sup>56</sup> Health care workers did not generally view their work as a business but as a service or vocation. This was a good fit with the union's emphasis on cooperation and Christian principles of fairness and justice in the workplace.

By the late 1980s the union's membership was approximately 15,000 members. It had

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<sup>55</sup> Author interview with Gerald Vandezande.

<sup>56</sup> Gideon Strauss and Hank Beekhuis both remarked on the special appropriateness of the healthcare vocation being represented by the CLAC. Author interview with Gideon Strauss. Author interview with Hank Beekhuis.

taken almost twenty-five years to reach this level. In the next seven years the union's numbers increased by one hundred per cent mostly through expansion in its traditional sectors but also by growing into other areas such as grocery stores in Alberta and various other service oriented industries such as the hospitality industry.<sup>57</sup> By the late 1990s, the union's membership stood at around the 25,000 mark. The union also began to expand into the private education sector by unionising many private Christian school teachers especially in the Niagara and Chatham areas which are home to many Christian evangelical schools. These are people who traditionally have not been represented in the workplace and are employees who deserve "good representation" and the CLAC aims to provide this.<sup>58</sup> With the approaching fiftieth anniversary of the organisation's founding, the union has taken upon itself to set goals for its future.

The year 2002 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the meeting of a few dedicated Christian unionists in Ontario that brought the CLAC into being. The union has understandably chosen this time to assess its role in the country over these years and also to consider its future direction. The CLAC's National Board is creating a document which will be discussed at their September 2002 National Convention. They hope to promote discussion about the future direction of the union. Where is it going? In what industries and areas will it grow?

The CLAC hopes in the coming years to expand the training and education of its members. It hopes to do this through the more extensive preparation of stewards, i.e., the introduction of a three level steward's training course to better serve the membership. They are

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<sup>57</sup> Obviously a one hundred percent growth on 15,000 members is not very large in terms of the broader labour movement. The CLAC, even at 25,000, is still dwarfed by other public and private sector unions with memberships in the hundreds of thousands.

<sup>58</sup> Author interview with Gideon Strauss.

also developing and expanding courses for the skills training of their members, particularly in the construction industry, in order for these individuals to remain competitive in the changing labour market. Furthermore the CLAC encourages multi-skilling of workers, a stance that further rejects the “competitive and rigidly exclusionary trade jurisdiction model”.<sup>59</sup> The union also hopes to create permanent training facilities in British Columbia and Ontario by 2005.

The CLAC also hopes to move beyond its opportunistic organising strategy of the past. Previously, the CLAC took up opportunities that came its way through individual workers and contacts in the community. The union would like to move beyond this to a strategy that attempts to actively attract new members from the construction, health care, retail, warehousing and transportation among others. The stated goal is to add 2,000 members per year.<sup>60</sup>

Geographically the union has the most representation in British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario, with smaller numbers of workers in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and the territories. It is the hope of the CLAC that they will be able to spread east into the Maritimes as well as expanding further into Manitoba, Eastern Ontario and the Okanagan Valley.<sup>61</sup> The CLAC’s latest attempt to enter eastern Canada was upset this year in a negative decision by the Nova Scotia Labour Relations Board (NSLRB). This decision was later upheld by the Nova Scotia Court of appeal. In its decision the NSLRB had ruled that the construction industry provisions of the Labour Relations Act dictate that there is only room for one union per skilled craft. As there is one

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<sup>59</sup> “Growing the Union: CLAC Action Plan” CLAC: unpublished manuscript.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.



Washington, D.C. based union in each of the 14 crafts there is “no room for [the] CLAC”.<sup>62</sup>

Hank Beekhuis saw this decision as very undemocratic and being contrary to the spirit of freedom of association laws.<sup>63</sup>

The action plan as well as the recent history of the union show an organisation that is optimistically looking towards the future. If the union continues its present pattern of growth this optimism will be well founded. But in order to do this it must continue to expand in its areas of strength in the construction, health care and service sectors as well as spread geographically into new areas of the country.

In conclusion, the CLAC has been able to survive in the Canadian labour scene for almost forty years as a union with government recognition. It has faced numerous obstacles to its very survival that needed to be overcome in order to ensure the union’s continued existence. Also during this time the union managed to break out of its traditional base in the construction industry and into health care, hospitality, private religious schools and other service sectors areas. In the union’s view, its success and hope for future growth arise from the union’s belief that it provides a true alternative to other mainstream unions in the CLC and building trades.

The CLAC’s leadership believes that they have succeeded thus far and will continue to grow in the coming years. The union’s growth will come through its ability to provide a true alternative with a different way of doing trade unionism that is to the benefit of its workers. How do we assess these claims? What are these distinctive traits and how do these provide the union

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<sup>62</sup> Christian Labour Association of Canada v. Labour Relations Board (NS) Construction Industry Panel, 2002 NSCA 73.

<sup>63</sup> Author interview with Hank Beekhuis.

with tools to better serve its members? Further, how does the union operate in practice? Does the union offer a truly positive alternative to traditional union strategies or does it fail to provide a strategy for a future labour movement?

### CHAPTER THREE -- Christian Unionism: Theory and Practice.

Bargaining contracts are the bread and butter of trade unionism. For the most part, unions confront employers over the basic (but nevertheless universal and fundamental) issues of wages and working conditions such as promotion, vacations, pensions, health and safety, etc. Within this contested arena, the CLAC claims to offer its members several distinct, if not unique, practices. The leadership believes that these practices will give the CLAC a competitive advantage over mainstream unions and provide to its membership added value in its day-to-day interactions with its employers. Before we examine several of the most distinctive elements in the union's approach to collective bargaining and labour relations, it may be useful to examine one case where the CLAC is seen in action. The Univision marketing case offers an example of the limits and obstacles that can face unions in the workplace.

#### The Univision Case

If someone from the labour community knows anything about the CLAC it most likely stems from the union's involvement in the Univision Marketing case. This corporation's workforce was organised by the CLAC in 1996 and the ensuing struggles between the union, company and workforce brought it a certain degree of publicity within the labour movement and the "left wing" press. All of these reports were highly critical of the CLAC's handling of the case. It is therefore important, in any discussion about how the union operates, to discuss what happened there. Although the leftist alternative newspapers showed the union in a very negative

light, I believe that by re-reading the events it will show a more mixed and complex situation. The union's failure at Univision was detrimental to the company's workforce. However, it is another question as to whether it was the distinctive elements of the union's approach that brought this failure about and whether another union would have been anymore successful in this particular workplace. It is also important that details, that were left out of the press reports, are factored into the case.

The facts of the case are fairly straightforward. The Univision Marketing company was an evangelically Christian workplace drawing much of its workforce from the evangelical community, especially by recruiting employees from Ontario Bible College in North York, Ontario. The company specialised in marketing for charitable and non-profit organisations, helping in fund-raising for groups as diverse as Christian evangelical ministries, Amnesty International and the Reform Party. The Christian nature of the workplace was paramount as many of the workers took part in company prayers. However, the company was by all accounts not so charitable to its workforce.

Workers were not paid simply for being at work but only for working at their computers soliciting clients. Hence, when there were computer problems, when they went to the washroom, or when the boss needed their attention for some other task, they were simply not paid. Stories of maltreatment abounded within the company. In addition to the expected stories of unfair dismissals and disciplining, there were various outrageous stories. One group of employees were asked to stay for an extra hour after work for filling envelopes. They were paid with pizza. Another time several employees were given wires to untangle. The one who did the work the fastest was given twenty dollars. Those who failed to untangle the wire the quickest were simply

docked pay since they were away from their desks. In another case the firm demanded that employees who wanted to work on the latest marketing project for the Reform Party had to first join the political party in order to obtain work.<sup>64</sup> Univision was a company that required a more equal power relation between its management and employees. Unionising was the most logical step toward this equalisation.

Several employees decided to approach the CLAC to help them unionise the company. These employees felt that the CLAC's Christian orientation would be an easier match with the evangelical nature of both the employer and the workforce. It was thought that the employer would be more willing to accept a specifically Christian union. The employees were also wary of being faced with a strike as many were opposed in principle to industrial action.<sup>65</sup> As the CLAC had a policy to avoid strikes whenever possible and because this first collective agreements were often easier than subsequent ones, the union felt that a strike was unlikely.

They were wrong. From the time that the CLAC won the certification vote in August 1996, the company proved itself to have a profoundly anti-union mentality. It quickly made its displeasure known to the workforce as it disciplined and otherwise penalised several people who were involved with the union drive. One employee was arbitrarily dismissed, leading to protests from the union and a case brought by the union before the OLRB.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>Livesey, (1998) p.27-29; Charlie Angus <http://www.nowtoronto.com/issues/17/29/News/feature.html>.

<sup>65</sup> Author interview with Peter Vanderkloet.

<sup>66</sup> This employee later won a favourable out of court settlement. The settlement was reached after the breakdown of the union's bargaining relationship with Univision employees. Author interview with Peter Vanderkloet. Mr. Vanderkloet is a representative of the union working out of the Mississauga office. He was the representative assigned to the Univision case and dealt with the organising campaign, bargaining and grievances that arose from it.

The negotiations were also difficult. The company refused to budge on even the most basic wage and language issues. The end result was after many months of negotiations the company and the union had come to a dead end. In circumstances where the company and the union seem unable to come to any sort of agreement, it is CLAC's policy to offer outside binding arbitration. The management of Univision refused this request. CLAC needed to make a decision and decided that this was one of the few situations where a strike was necessary. As the CLAC representative who worked on the Univision case has stated, if there was ever a company that deserved a strike this was it.<sup>67</sup> But before a strike could be called, they required that the membership at the company agree to take this step. Things "were going to get dirty".<sup>68</sup> The union's readiness to strike in this case shows very clearly the extent to which relations between the company and union had broken down. In the past 45 years the union had only had three strikes and certainly did not make the decision to ask for a strike mandate lightly. The union felt that without a strike mandate further negotiating was pointless.

Bruce Livesey has argued that the way Peter Vanderkloet handled the negotiating was flawed. According to Livesey, Vanderkloet refused to seek binding arbitration with the OLRB due to the "political climate" at the OLRB at that time. Indeed, Vanderkloet believed that the changes brought by the Progressive Conservative government of Mike Harris in 1995 made it exceedingly difficult to have a forced arbitration brought about by the OLRB.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Author interview with Peter Vanderkloet.

<sup>68</sup> Author interview with Ed Grootenboer.

<sup>69</sup> Author interview with Peter Vanderkloet. I would like to state that I have no expertise in judging the wisdom of this choice by Peter Vanderkloet. However, I also question whether Livesey's condemnation arises from any greater degree of knowledge of the difficulty of pursuing this case in front of the OLRB.

The prospects for a victory in this strike vote seemed unlikely from the outset. The employees had previously stated to the union's representative that they did not want to have a strike. Univision Marketing, like many service oriented firms, also employs a workforce with a high turnover rate. Many of the original supporters of the union had left the company either voluntarily or after an incident that would otherwise have been grieved. Some of the new employees were opposed to the union. It is here that the stories of the union and the disaffected former employees published in the labour press diverge strongly. According to Vanderkloet, the union's strike vote failed due to lack of support in the bargaining unit. The union's supporters in the company attempted to boycott the vote. They feared that the vote, and therefore the organising drive, would be unsuccessful.

Charlie Angus paints a different story. The vote was in response to a petition by a recent hire, Susan Simpson. She had sent a petition around the workplace in August 1997 requesting a decertification vote. It is this vote that Liz McLean encouraged fellow employees to boycott. In any case, the union failed to win the vote and the bargaining unit was decertified (although this decertification was not clear in law and needed the decision of the OLRB to make it official). The discrepancy may be most clearly resolved by realising that the strike vote was a defacto vote of support of the union (and possibly in violation of OLRB rules). The victory in this vote would have meant a strike action. A failure left the union with no where to go.

In the Fall of 1997, several employees brought a complaint against the union to the OLRB. They accused the union of abandoning the bargaining unit. The case went before the OLRB and it was found as a point of law that the members had no standing in accusing the union of abandonment before the OLRB. The OLRB official hearing the case was Mary Ellen

Cummings. Cummings allowed certain aspects of the case against the union to go forward while disallowing the employees' charges of unfair labour practices on the technical grounds that only the union had a right to bring these. The employees' accusations against the CLAC were, according to Cummings, "proven, but barely".<sup>70</sup> She further was uncertain as to whether the union had actually broken any part of the provincial OLRB labour code. The remainder of the suit was resolved out of court and included a non-disclosure clause about the terms of the agreement.<sup>71</sup>

It must be stated that any union would face tremendous difficulties in unionising and servicing a workplace such as Univision Marketing. The conservative nature of the workforce made unionisation difficult. Further, the intransigence of the employer made the drive very arduous. The numbers of employees was also relatively small. There were only approximately thirty employees at the beginning of the certification process (although this had increased to about sixty by the fall of 1997).<sup>72</sup> Would another union have bothered to put the effort into a drive such as this? This naturally begs the question of whether another union, even a much more militant one, would have been able to succeed where the CLAC failed. Also the pitfalls of an industry where high turnover is a norm will affect any union drive.

The resulting anger and disappointment around the failure of negotiations may also have been reflected in the publicity that the union received from the labour press. There were only a few employees that became vocal opponents of the union. This could reflect the responses of

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<sup>70</sup> Charlie Angus, <http://www.nowtoronto.com/issues/17/29/News/feature.html>.

<sup>71</sup> This non-disclosure clause has restricted what the CLAC could tell me about the case with its former Univision employed members. Because of this certain aspects of the case were left undiscussed or vague.

<sup>72</sup> Livesey, 1998:29.



employees abandoned and badly served by their union. Alternatively, it could be a sign of employees trapped in a situation where the union was simply unable to work miracles. In this case I believe that the CLAC's record of service is inconclusive. Contextually, the union may have done its best in a bad situation.

Concluding anything from this case is made especially difficult by the legal circumstances surrounding it. Peter Vanderkloet and other CLAC officials felt uncomfortable talking to the labour press reporters in any depth while the case was before the OLRB. This left the reports with a rather one-sided story of the events. In addition, the company refused comment on these issues to the reporters. Now several years after the events a non-disclosure clause in the legal agreement makes a full disclosure of what occurred difficult if not impossible.

The Univision Marketing case provides an example, albeit an exaggerated one, of how the CLAC tries to operate. It also illustrates certain issues and limitations to the CLAC's distinct approach to labour relations. It is to the principles of this approach that we now turn.

If the Christian Labour Association of Canada is by any standard unique, it is in the collection of principles that the union has come to embody. The present education director for the CLAC, Dr. Gideon Strauss, has put it aptly, if quaintly, that much like humans share a great deal of genetic traits with primates, the CLAC shares "95% of its bargaining DNA with other unions". This comment is in agreement with those made by several other interviewees from the CLAC. They who see the union's approach as being in tune with what other unions do in practice, if not in rhetoric. Below I shall highlight several of the distinctive policies of the union as well as how and why the union feels these are important to a Christian approach to labour

relations.

### The Strike Policy.

At the beginning of the CLAC's history in the early 1950s, one of its key arguments was that the state of industrial relations in Canada was in crisis, i.e. the nation's record strike levels in the 1940s and 1960s. To combat this, the CLAC hoped that by introducing a less confrontational approach to labour relations they would be able to eliminate use of the "strike weapon," at least within Christian union bargaining. The CLAC has held that while employees should always have the right to withdraw their services (with the exception of essential services), the practice of this right should be avoided as much as possible. Indeed, there have been only three or four strikes<sup>73</sup> since the early 1970s in CLAC workplaces. The occasional strike may even be healthy to just to show that the union is willing to walk the picket line to back up its demands. As Hank Beekhuis said: "The CLAC has to go on strike occasionally as a political thing... Just to prove that we do it."<sup>74</sup> However, the CLAC holds that strikes should be avoided principally because they are a no-win solution to issues in the workplace that could be more fairly solved through arbitration. In summary, employees lose their pay, the employer loses profit and everyone returns after the strike to a workplace that is often filled with acrimony. Furthermore, there are social costs outside the equation of the familial and corporate bottom lines that are often overlooked by those who

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<sup>73</sup> Despite the number of strikes being so few in number no one is quite sure how many there have been. Hank Beekhuis remembers that the second strike was ongoing at about the time he came to be an employee of the CLAC in the early 1970s (Author interview with Hank Beekhuis).

<sup>74</sup> Author interview with Hank Beekhuis.

support the “frequent” recourse to striking.

Hank Beekhuis believes that the social costs of a strike need to be examined more carefully. He argues that the CLAC:

[T]akes a basic approach that a strike really doesn’t help either side. I reflect on, for example, some of the strikes up in Sudbury with Inco. Where people spent six, eight months on strike and at the end of the day the settlement that they reached was barely different than from what they started with. And what the trade union movement has not fully appreciated is the social cost. If you look at that strike, for example, with the steel workers, there were suicides, divorces, people losing their homes and this thing went on and on and on. Ultimately the reality was that they came out with something like twenty-five cents [increase] or something like that. Meanwhile the social cost, the wreckage that they left behind... I think you always have to be cognizant of that. People are very dependant on their incomes and strike pay doesn’t fill that void. I think that the right to strike is necessary. Every worker should have the right to withdraw their services. I don’t think it should be a primary tool.<sup>75</sup>

Two other CLAC interviewees argued that other unions are too eager to take the path towards striking. They argue that before striking one should make every attempt to exhaust all other avenues of bargaining so that the strike vote should be the last recourse for a bargaining unit to take. Yet, they find within mainstream unions it has been a tradition to take the opposite route by holding a strike vote at the same time they discuss proposals for negotiations:

They take a strike vote up front so that they send in their committee with a strong mandate. What that does is that it empowers the few people at the table to call a strike... But, for example, if there’s a decent offer at the table the workers never get a chance to vote on it because it is cut off by the bargaining committee. That can be a powerful tool. I think it can be a bit irresponsible.

Workers have the right to make those decisions themselves. I give people a lot more credit than that. I don’t think they’re sheep. I think people are quite cognizant of the issues and they can make up their own minds on that. On the other hand that doesn’t mean that the threat of the strike shouldn’t be there. I think it should be there at the end

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<sup>75</sup> Author interview with Hank Beekhuis.

of the day.<sup>76</sup>

Ed Grootenboer commented on the outside workers' strike by CUPE in Toronto in the Summer of 2002 which was ongoing at the time of the interview. He complained that the union's members did not even know what was in the city's final offer. Yet they were putting their livelihood on the picket line.<sup>77</sup> To avoid strikes the CLAC has had as its policy to always offer binding arbitration to employers. It is only after this is rejected that the union will resort to the use of the strike weapon.

The CLAC's arguments against strikes represents one of the main critiques that the CLAC has offered against the mainstream labour movement in Canada. Another principle that arises repeatedly throughout the CLAC's literature and the interviews is the idea of freedom of association. Workers should be given the freedom of choice to join or not join a union, or to switch unions. Raiding should not be a dirty word in labour circles and should encourage better service of unions toward their members as well as democratic choice. Unions themselves should respect the beliefs of their members and not use their dues to support partisan political causes. It is this critique and distinctive we now move on to.

#### Democracy and Freedom of Association.

The CLAC has always argued that it is an essential mark of liberal democracy and of the

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<sup>76</sup> Author interview with Hank Beekhuis.

<sup>77</sup> Author interview with Ed Grootenboer.

Christian notion of justice<sup>78</sup> that individuals have the freedom of choice in the workplace.<sup>79</sup>

Workers should be allowed to choose a union of their choice without having that right curtailed by government or by the collusion of either the unions or the employers. Furthermore, workers should have the right to freely decide not to join any union if they so choose without repercussions to their livelihood or chances of promotion in the workplace. In the 1950s and 1960s the right to refuse to join a union did not exist for dissenting employees of a unionised firm. Numerous people were fired for their refusal to join and the CLAC, in association with the Committee for Justice and Liberty<sup>80</sup> (CJL), fought for this right to be enshrined in the 1960s via the court decision regarding Dirk Hoogedroon of Orangeville who had been a United Steelworkers of America (USWA) member.<sup>81</sup> In this case, the courts decided that it was required of unions to represent all members of a bargaining unit on whose behalf the collective agreement had been negotiated. If that member refused to join the union he or she still had to be represented by the union to the same competence as any other member would be. The CJL, through their representative Gerald Vandezande, lobbied the government in the following decade to have the

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<sup>78</sup> It has often been pointed out by theologians that the Lord gave Adam the choice to choose between obeying His law and abstaining or disobeying His commandment and eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

<sup>79</sup> For an early discussion within the CLAC of this concept please see Gerald Vandezande, (1967) The Freedom to Serve. Rexdale, ON.: Christian Labour Association of Canada. For a more recent discussion of similar themes see Ed Grootenboer, (1995[1990]). Highlights of an alternative labour movement. Mississauga, ON.: Christian Labour Association of Canada.

<sup>80</sup> The Committee for Justice and Liberty (CJL) grew jointly out of the CLAC and Christian Reformed community. It sought to challenge more broadly issues surrounding freedom and justice within Canadian society. It later became known as Citizens for Public Justice (CPJ) which came to fight for groups such as the poor, Natives and women. Gerald Vandezande became its director when he left the CLAC in 1973. It was a post he held until his retirement in the late 1990s.

<sup>81</sup> Vandezande, Freedom to Serve, p.10-11.

government change the law to allow dissenting members to pay their dues to a mutually acceptable charity rather than the union, thereby yielding to conscience while avoiding the “free-rider” mentality that refusing to pay dues may encourage.<sup>82</sup>

Freedom of choice for workers is of paramount importance. It is for this reason that the CLAC, often the victim of raiding itself, has seen raiding as an essential part of a healthy unionism. As François Vaudreuil, the leader of the Québec union Centrale des Syndicats Démocratiques (CSD), a fellow member of the World Federation of Trade Unions and with whom the CLAC has a fraternal relationship), has stated, “the idea that only one union represents all the workers in the same sector of activity is widespread notably in the construction industry. But behind this monopolistic strategy lies the profile of the specter of magic thought, of single thought and of a dominant discourse. She presents herself as a panacea for all ills but she announces the death of a fundamental liberty, that of choice.”<sup>83</sup> It is for this reason that Vaudreuil states it is this plurality of opinions and tendencies brought by an array of labour unions in an industry that is “the only manner that guarantees the freedom of expression, decision and action of workers”. This statement also reflects well the stance of the CLAC. There is a belief that individual workers should be given the choice of choosing which union they would like to represent them. They should not have their choices curtailed by government (as recently took place in Nova Scotia) nor by the unions themselves entering into non-raiding pacts with other unions. If rank and file

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<sup>82</sup> In his interview with me, Gerald Vandezande stated that he had given evidence before the legislature on this very issue although he was unsure of in which year this took place. (Author interview with Gerald Vandezande).

<sup>83</sup> Monsieur Vaudreuil made this statement at the 2002 CSD convention address entitled “the strength of solidarity resides in pluralism [La force de la solidarité réside dans le pluralisme]” and can be found on the CSD website at [www.csd.qc.ca](http://www.csd.qc.ca) (translation by the author).

members are dissatisfied with the union representation they are receiving, they should be able during the so-called open period to challenge the present union.<sup>84</sup> The CLAC sees it as an ideal situation to have two or three unions vying for the support of the workers at a particular firm during this period. This competitive situation will ensure the maintenance of good service to members.

The leadership of the CLAC decries how this freedom is often curtailed in practice. Ed Grootenboer reflects several of the comments made by CLAC members and within the union's publications in stating:

If [restricting freedom of association] happened in any other area of society... we'd scream! There would be blood in the streets. If the government tomorrow said look, we've looked around and said what's the point of having all these different churches and denominations it's a mess so from now on if you're Catholic you belong to the Catholic Church and if you're protestant you belong to, let's say, to the Baptist church there would be hell to pay. But in labour relations it is so far removed from the public eye, that people, until they get involved, they either don't think about it or then they are surprised. It's regarded as okay to compromise people's [freedom of] association.<sup>85</sup>

The CLAC hopes for a time when workers can choose a union which works best for them. This would be a milieu where unions will truly compete for the loyalty of their current and potential members.

### Industrial versus Craft Unionism

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<sup>84</sup> Gideon Strauss believes that it would be ideal for two or three unions to vie for the membership of a particular workplace. This competition would encourage unions to offer better service to its members. (Author interview with Gideon Strauss).

<sup>85</sup> Author interview with Ed Grootenboer.

The CLAC's approach to the construction industry is based upon an industrial union structure. The union attempts to unionise its workplaces on a wall-to-wall basis and not along craft lines as the craft unions who dominate much of the construction industry have done.<sup>86</sup> This system has many different advantages over that of craft unionism. Important to both employees and management is the lack of jurisdictional disputes that are common within firms which are organised on a craft basis. This removes certain headaches and complexities for employers who otherwise would have to deal with five or six unions' officials and agreements. For employees who have numerous skills (for example one person may be skilled to do carpentry and bricklaying)<sup>87</sup> they can transfer between jobs without the associated contentions of working under two collective agreements and within two unions. The workplace becomes more smoothly run with less conflict and fewer hours lost through disagreement.

Another distinctive feature of the CLAC's approach to the construction industry is the union's aversion to the hiring hall system. They stress the need for a community of work where there is stability for the workers and a consistency. Hank Beekhuis discussed the advantages of continued employment over the hiring hall system. He says that the construction employees':

primary focus is the employer that they're working for and not the union. It's not the union that hires them. It's the employer that hires them... So, we take a different view... Our people... at the end of a job, they don't all go back to the hiring hall. You know, they

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<sup>86</sup> Obviously there are exceptions to this. The Labourers International Union of North America (LIUNA) organises itself in the construction industry in much the same industrial manner.

<sup>87</sup> This arises from the gradual deskilling that has effected many traditional trades within the construction industry. General labourers may become capable of doing certain tasks that previously required much more extensive qualifications. It is these workers that would find this type of advancement and multitasking an advantage.



generally keep working and sometimes they keep working even when there's not a lot of work around. So, they have more year round employment. So, at the end of the year they probably do better than probably fifty percent or the bottom half of the list at the hiring hall. And I think people appreciate that. People appreciate stability. They don't appreciate being treated like a rented tool, which is really a tool rental agency, what is what the hiring hall sometimes amounts to. And they can build some kind of a work community in terms of working as a team with people that they don't have new people everyday coming in... It is more of a community effort. So, our wages and our collective agreements tend to be structured a little bit differently with that assumption in mind. That doesn't mean that we are not competitive. We have to remain competitive in order to get enough people to work and bring them into that sort of way of thinking.<sup>88</sup>

Beekhuis believes therefore, that workers are more able to count on a degree of stability in their work lives. To have familiar faces around oneself and the assurance of a job today as well as tomorrow must, in themselves, be of value to a worker. The structure of wages in the collective agreement are also different. What do these different wages mean? They mean that the CLAC member makes less on paper than his counterparts in traditional craft unions. Beekhuis states that "[t]here are some people who are so used to the hiring hall system that they have been polluted in their thinking. They will proudly tell you that they make \$28.00 an hour but they only work three months out of the year. Well that doesn't do you a whole lot of good if you are on unemployment for nine months of the year".<sup>89</sup> So, according to this CLAC official, the average CLAC member makes less but works more. Is the trade off between wages and stability a valid one? The equation is not that clear or simple. The existence of so-called "stabilization funds" and extra-contractual agreements also play a part in non-CLAC labour agreements. Numerous unions use a premium taken from their worker's wages which are added to a so-called "stabilization

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<sup>88</sup> Author interview with Hank Beekhuis.

<sup>89</sup> Author interview with Hank Beekhuis. This is obviously an exaggeration to illustrate the point. It is also doubtful to whether individual workers with higher seniority would be faced with such hardship in a traditional hiring hall structure.

fund”. These are then used to help the union’s employers to outbid non-union and non-building trade council organised companies for important construction projects. Further, due to the nature of the construction industry companies are often forced to pay their unionised employees below union rates of pay as stipulated in their collective agreements in order for the construction firm to competitively bid for projects. These are practices that are tacitly accepted by the craft unions’ representatives. These practices add credence to the argument that industry wide conditions play a pivotal role on the value in wages and benefits that can be extracted from an employer, especially when the employer itself may be working for a general contractor. Failure to offer competitive wages to one’s employer in the construction industry can lead very quickly to an idle employer and consequently idle workers. The CLAC has had to open collective agreements in several cases in the past when the employer was unable to operate under the agreed wage structure. The employer was simply outbid by more competitive union and non-union firms.

The stance that the CLAC takes against hiring halls is partly dependent on market conditions. Although the CLAC has been able to avoid the use of hiring halls in Ontario and British Columbia, the union has failed to produce similar results in Alberta. Hiring halls are very useful strategies for large construction projects where several hundred may be hired at once or where, as in Alberta, the construction industry tends to be more cyclical.<sup>90</sup> For such reasons, the CLAC has been forced to take a hiring hall approach although it still sees such a result as less than desirable.

These differences with other, although not all, construction sector unions may give the CLAC a distinct advantage. More empirical evidence would be needed to discover the truth of

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<sup>90</sup> Author interview with Hank Beekhuis.

this stance. The union's aversion to strikes may also distinguish the CLAC from other unions although it is questionable how often mainstream unions engage in industrial action. It is necessary to critically reflect on many of the issues brought up by the CLAC - for example how the union's distinctly conservative stances on these and other issues will effect its ability to confront the many pressing issues effecting the Canadian working class. Do these distinctive positions change the ability of the CLAC to effectively represent its membership or are they truly an advantage that will assist the union to grow?

## Chapter 4: CONCLUSION.

In this final chapter the question of whether or not the CLAC is a union that works well on behalf of its members should really be broken down into three individual questions. The first is how does the CLAC operate as a union towards its members? Is it successful in procuring adequate collective agreements for members of its locals? Does its distinctive philosophy towards unionism and bargaining help or hinder this endeavour? Second, how does the union's philosophy affect the wider society? In other words how does the union's ideological commitments connect with a wider agenda for justice for workers and social change? And, how are these commitments comparable to those of other unions? And, third is how do the union's critiques of the failings of the so-called mainstream union movement hold up to scrutiny.

Answering the first of these questions must fall outside the scope of this study. More in depth, complex and critical studies must be made of the various sectors that the union is part of and these must be compared with those of other competing unions. To do anything less would simply be weighing the claims and counterclaims of parties that are far from being disinterested observers. I have come to the conclusion at the end of this study that the CLAC must be doing something right to explain its modest but continuing rise in numbers throughout the 1990s. To simply dismiss this fact as additional evidence of the CLAC's business unionism as other unions are prone to do, would not be fair to the union. What I would suggest are several studies that would answer this question empirically.

a) A study of the differences in strike settlements. One of the arguments that the CLAC has made about strikes is that they usually hurt employees financially and in personal non-work areas of their lives, while generally accomplishing very little in terms of increased wages and benefits. It would be useful to survey the differences between final offers and the post-strike settlements achieved by mainstream craft and CLC unions. Is the tool of the strike used effectively or do other unions run readily and irresponsibly into labour stoppages like the CLAC claims?

b) A study of the CLAC's representation in the construction industry, looking particularly at the union's industrial structure and its effects on contract and actual pay rates across trades, regions and firm size. One must also take into account what actual workers make over a year, remembering that a worker making \$28.00 per hour is not necessarily better off than one making \$20.00 per hour if the former is unemployed for most of the year. The seniority of employees should also be taken into account. Does an employee with lower seniority benefit more from the system that the CLAC uses versus the hiring hall system? Finally, industry wide conditions must be taken into account. If a company is failing to win contracts it means that a collective agreement is of little value to idle workers. CLAC has often been willing to offer concessions in such circumstances.

One of the CLAC's selling points in the construction industry is that its programme produces more stability in the workplace allowing for a "community of work life" to develop over time as employees are able to form relationships with those around them. It is therefore necessary to find qualitative surveys or interviews that are capable of discovering whether individuals within a more

stable industrial unionised environment are happier than those who are in a more traditional craft-union hiring hall situation.

c) A study of the agreements reached by CLAC on behalf of its healthcare workers. This study would have to take into account the differences between regions, firm size and other pertinent factors. The CLAC leaders that I interviewed believe that their agreements are competitive with other unions in the field. Other union's officials on the other hand beg to differ. Empirical evidence would be needed to sort out which side was correct on this issue.

d) Finally, there needs to be a study of representation of members. There has been the suggestion put forward by Paul Forder of the CAW, along with other members of the labour community, that the CLAC fails to serve its members adequately.<sup>91</sup> This has become apparent to Forder through various conversations with disaffected CLAC members. He believes that there is a lack of service by the union's officials when issues in the workplace arise. However, my discussions with the CLAC officials have led me to believe that the CLAC serves its members relatively well in the cases that I have been made aware of. Also, the CLAC has a greater willingness to service smaller workplaces and keeps a considerably lower ratio of officials to membership (approximately one to six hundred).

#### Ideological Commitments.

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<sup>91</sup> Author interview with Paul Forder.

It is my belief that the acrimonious relations that have existed between the CLAC and the mainstream unions since the former's inception have much more to do with ideological clashes than any substantive issue surrounding the servicing of members. The CLAC is unashamedly an Evangelically Christian based organisation that is anti-socialist in its mentality. In its early years the union was particularly critical of the CCF and later the NDP for their left wing positions. Today, they are non-partisan politically and only enter into lobbying on behalf of their membership, for example by giving input on a healthcare or construction industry proposal before the legislature.<sup>92</sup> This comes from the perspective that union members are of all political hues and should not be forced to support a political party they disagree with simply because they support the union.

To a certain degree I have sympathy with their position of non-partisanship. The leaders of many of the CLC's unions have historically tended to give almost uncritical support to the NDP both provincially and nationally. However the immense problems that are facing the world presently have a great deal to do with the rationality and irrationality<sup>93</sup> of the capitalist system in general. In my view this is where the philosophy of Christian social justice begins to break down. Economic crises are not, as the American President George W. Bush has recently suggested, the result of a few unscrupulous individuals. Rather, it is the system itself that produces the systemic

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<sup>92</sup> I have been assured by Ed Grootenboer, that the head office in Mississauga contains many people who are politically active and some of these vote for the Mike Harris style of politics, some for the Liberals and some for the New Democrats.

Although this non-partisanship stance is different than many of the CLC unions, it is quite similar to the position taken by many of the building trade unions who traditionally have been opposed to supporting the NDP or other political parties.

<sup>93</sup> I refer to Marx's notion that the individual capitalist acts in a manner that is rational but when these actions are viewed on a systemic level we are faced with a irrational crisis that threatens the system as a whole.

opportunities and pressures that push individuals toward such actions. Similarly, although moral suasion and good labour relations will help defend jobs and keep some employers in a particular location, they do not significantly alter the way the capitalist enterprise is played out. The drive to increase profits, decrease costs, better technology and so forth remain constant pressures on industries. Some of these industries, due to specific local advantages such as proximity to market or a knowledge based workforce, will stay in their present locations while others will pull up their stakes and move to Montgomery, Puebla or Shenzhen. The CLAC's officials seemed somewhat cognizant of this fact, realizing that keeping an industry in place is often beyond a union's control.<sup>94</sup>

In a globalised world it is necessary that all progressive organisations work together to challenge the continuing slide towards a destructive neo-liberalism and the ideology of “profit” (for what and for whom?). The challenges are immense and labour unions are well placed organisations for challenging governments and corporations. They are useful for providing the simple yet much needed infrastructure for creating dissent in an extra-parliamentary manner. Labour unions must take part in this because they have no choice in being overwhelmed by its effects. They shall either fight for making the voice of the common people heard or have to live with the effects on a community and firm level when it is not.

A perfect example of this possible channeling of dissent can be seen both in Ontario and abroad over the last six years. The Days of Action protest would not have seemed even possible

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<sup>94</sup> Hank Beekhuis has said as much. He believes that a labour union can work to promote a positive environment for both the employer and workers. However, this may not necessarily keep the company from leaving the community in which it is located. (Author interview with Hank Beekhuis).



without the input and energies of the large public and private sector unions. They helped provide many of the funds for telephones, fax machines, transportation and other infrastructure as well as providing many of the employees that converged for the strikes in Hamilton, London, Toronto and other cities. The eventual failure of these protests came about also from the unions' division, mutual acrimony and lackluster leadership. But the potential was there.<sup>95</sup> If the unions had taken a similar attitude to what the CLAC would hold this would have been a detrimental effect on upholding social justice for the poor, workers and others that had been effected by the Harris government's policies. But such a challenge may in the end result in tumultuous relations and not always consensus.

It is therefore argued that the CLAC holds an ideology that denies the possibility of creating a broader challenge to the status quo. Although the CLAC would hope other social organisations (namely the Citizens for Public Justice) may take up the cause of social reform, it is difficult to see where these organisations would gain the appropriate means to take their calling more forcefully into the public sphere.

#### Equal Pay for Equal work.

One of the primary difficulties one may have with the CLAC is the conservative nature of their approach to pay equity. The union has published that it supports the notion of "*equal pay*

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<sup>95</sup> I have explored these issues previously. See, Robert G. Thomas (2001). Mike Harris' Ontario and the Bungling of a mass politics: an examination and critique of social protests in Ontario, 1995-1999. St. Catharines, ON.: Brock University (unpublished manuscript).

*for equal work*” which has been a staple of Ontario human rights legislation since 1951. One cannot hire two individuals for one identical job and pay one person five dollars less simply because they are black, Jewish or a woman. The CLAC has, however, traditionally taken the position that they are opposed to the more radical solution usually referred to as “*equal pay for equal value*”. This latter point affects women rather than other groups as these individuals are more likely to be concentrated in certain poorly-paid occupations, especially in the service sector. The union has traditionally published accounts that are very critical of feminism in general and sees the offensive of the feminist lobby and the “equality zealots” most apparent in this debate. Ed Vanderkloet, who was formerly the director of the CLAC in the 1970s and 1980s, has written that many of the differences between men and women’s rates of pay is the result of various factors that clearly do not result from discrimination. The life choices that women make to leave the workforce to look after children or the desire that many women have to only work part-time are considered to be the real reasons that women have lower rates of pay than men. Pay equity is truly unnecessary. But what Vanderkloet seems to miss is that these are the very reasons that women require pay equity. Women, by choice or circumstances, find themselves in part-time employment. Women often make these choices based on childcare commitments coupled with a lack of affordable childcare. When they return to work they are left in lower positions in corporations and often in service sector job ghettos as they struggle to both manage a family and earn a living.<sup>96</sup> These are precisely the conditions that the attempts at pay equity try to however imperfectly to confront. To deny the need for such programmes is a reactionary response to a pressing need.

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<sup>96</sup> Ann Duffy and Norene Pupo. (1992). The Part-time Paradox. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart.

### The promise of representation of Christian Schools.

Does the CLAC discriminate against people based on their religious scruples? As we have discussed above, the potential discrimination of a religiously partisan trade union was ruled as not a legally justified reason to deny the CLAC certification in the Mr. Justice McRuer decision of 1963. The union has always argued that there is no such thing as a neutral trade union in terms of the religious question. One is either for a Christian perspective or against it -- no one can be neutral on this issue.<sup>97</sup> Further some of the more slanderous accusations that have been leveled at the CLAC's "discriminatory" nature (most notably its alleged support for the Apartheid regime in South Africa)<sup>98</sup> have become more likely to land their speakers in court rather than close to the truth. The Christian nature of the union has actually allowed them to unionise workplaces that would otherwise be unreachable. This is especially so in regards to Christian schools an area of employment that often suffers from the unjustifiable demands of the school boards.

The nature of Christian schools is essentially discriminatory in that faculty members are required as a condition of employment to openly subscribe to certain beliefs about the Christian

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<sup>97</sup> Maybe it would be good to remind the reader of the words of Jesus on this point: "He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth." (Luke 11:23, KJV).

<sup>98</sup> Accusations of Apartheid links come back essentially to the historic religious links the CLAC holds with the Christian Reformed Church in North America and that organisation's fraternal links with the Reformed Churches in South Africa (RCSA). Although the CRC-NA had dealt with the American race issue since the 1960s they only declared apartheid as being at odds with Christian commitment in 1984. They then suspended ties with their South African brethren near the end of the apartheid era in 1989, a decision that was in effect until 1996 (from information available at [www.crcna.org](http://www.crcna.org)).

Gospel and the proper living of this belief in everyday life. It is doubtful that a mainstream union would touch Christian schools because of its perceived lack of radicalism, small number of employees, and the discriminatory, albeit perfectly legal, hiring practices the schools generally are involved in.<sup>99</sup> For example, what would the Canadian Autoworkers' (CAW) gay and lesbian or women's caucuses say about unionising a workplace whose explicit tasks included teaching children that homosexual conduct is immoral and that wives should obey their husbands? Certainly the political principles of mainstream unions would make it exceedingly difficult for them to represent an archly conservative constituency. Yet, it is very important that these workers receive representation. Christian school workers can often suffer from the arbitrary dictates of the school boards they work for. It may be one thing to ask a school worker to abstain from extramarital sexual relations (since one would expect Evangelical Christians to believe the rightness of this action to begin with). But it is another thing when the school starts interfering in the lives of the teachers outside their school and religious commitments. Making unreasonable demands where these individuals send their children to school, demanding church involvement outside work hours, as opposed to membership or attendance, in a particular congregation, and of demanding doctrinal purity for jobs that do not require a faith commitment at all. (After all does a janitor need to subscribe to the Belgic Confession in order to adequately perform his

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<sup>99</sup>Christian schools have generally been allowed to hire people who share their beliefs in the importance of Christian education, in gospel truth, appropriate church membership and who are willing to live these beliefs in their day to day lives. In due course this discriminates against those of other faiths as well as those who would be involved in "unchristian" activities such as religiously prohibited sexual relations of a heterosexual or homosexual nature. In recent years the law has become more narrow in Canada when it comes to deciding which employees should be required to follow the school's rules as a condition of employment. Principals and faculty must follow the moral instruction of the school however janitors or librarians are not required to do so. (See especially the Vriend case in Alberta).

duties?)<sup>100</sup>

### CLAC versus mainstream unions.

The CLAC often seems to assume without question that it is the militancy of the union leadership that lead workers to take strike action. They believe that union leaders are involved in an acrimonious power struggle with employers. The other unions' leaders view these employers as adversaries through an "archaic" notion of class struggle.<sup>101</sup> It is argued by the CLAC that it would be more sensible to approach labour relations through a prism that stresses cooperation and recognises that both management and workers benefit from peaceful relations in the workplace.<sup>102</sup> However, the history of many strikes and work stoppages over the last three decades draws quite the opposite picture. This history often shows that it is often the employees themselves that initiate use of the "strike weapon." Often this is directly against the wishes and advice of the leaders in their union. One of the most prolific periods of strikes in Canadian history was during the early 1970s. Such work stoppages were often wildcat strikes with 30% of striking workers in the 1970s walking the picket line illegally. Such a large number of strikes arose neither from a vacuum nor from the militancy of the leadership but rather in response to real

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<sup>100</sup> Ed Vanderkloet. (1992) In and around the workplace: Christian directions in the world of work. Mississauga: CLAC, p.92-96.

<sup>101</sup> Ed Grootenboer used the term "archaic" to describe the rhetoric and mindset of many union leaders in the mainstream labour movement outside the CLAC. Author interview with Ed Grootenboer.

<sup>102</sup> See especially an article by Mark Turner on win-win bargaining in the workplace. Mark Turner (1998). "Win/win bargaining" in John Sutherland (ed.) Us and them: building a just workplace community. Mississauga, ON.: Work Research Foundation.

changes in the capitalist economy. These changes ranged from international competition, to automation and the crisis of stagflation. All of these posed real threats to the living standards and job security of workers. These workers were adamantly against the use of their declining real wages to buoy up capitalist profits. In such circumstances it becomes difficult to envision a win-win situation between management and workers. Profits or living standards had to decline. In the mid 1980s when the strike levels dropped significantly even below the peaceful levels of the 1950s it came more from the declining power of workers vis-a-vis capital. Workers were unwilling to challenge their companies in the face of mass unemployment and increasing automation.<sup>103</sup> Strikes and other forms of work stoppage are initiated by workers for many reasons. Often they are defensive to protect previous gains. Other times they are meant to obtain new concessions from the employer. Sometimes they arise from specific grievances on the shop floor.<sup>104</sup> The idea that they arise out of a culture of poor labour relations that can be fixed through an appeal to class cooperation denies the macro-economic foundations of many business decisions. The group that must pay the most for these systemic changes has historically been the working class. Further, such challenges usually arise from the rank-and-file members of the union and not from the bureaucrats as some within the CLAC would believe.

There is an argument made by many intellectuals on the left that the union bureaucracies, far from encouraging radicalism among workers, are actually there to defuse it. Bryan Palmer's

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<sup>103</sup> Craig Heron (1996). The History of the Canadian Labour Movement, 2nd ed. Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, p.90-97.

<sup>104</sup> James Rheinhart. (1996). The Tyranny of work. Toronto: Harcourt Brace. p.135-140.

argues this point by suggesting that union leadership has come to view its dues paying membership as property which must be “responsibly” maintained. In fact, the layer of union bureaucrats has an important interest in maintaining the status quo of class politics. The abolition of the capitalist system would not only remove the bourgeoisie but also the purpose of the unions. Sometimes it becomes important for the union leaders to allow their members to “blow off steam” through various strikes and protests. These must be co-opted by the union leaders to ensure that they do not get out of hand and into a radical direction.<sup>105</sup> Examples of this conservative leadership by the unions can be most clearly seen in the British Columbian Solidarity movement. Between 1983 and 1984 a broad based movement developed in the province to challenge the neo-liberal policies of the Bill Bennett Social Credit government. Numerous large protests were organised in the following months by the unions and various social justice organisations. Just as these protests were growing in strength the union leadership in the province attempted to de-escalate the struggle suggesting that energies were better spent on education and preparing for the next election than on general strikes. The government eventually offered some concessions to the unions but left much of the legislation in place that threatened human rights and the poor. The union leadership in the province abandoned the mass actions and came to an agreement with the premier for a 4% wage increase for public servants over three years and only 1,600 layoffs.<sup>106</sup> In the Days of Action campaign in Ontario in the second half of the 1990s there was a similar campaign initiated by angry workers against the policies of a government that many felt attacked

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<sup>105</sup> Bryan Palmer. (1992) Working-Class Experience. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart.

<sup>106</sup> Bryan Palmer (1987). Solidarity: the rise and fall of an opposition in BC. Vancouver, BC: New Star Books.

the poor and most vulnerable in the province. Here again we see certain unions, after a period of initial enthusiasm, encourage the channeling of energies away from extra-parliamentary protests into fighting for the victory of the NDP in the next election.<sup>107</sup> In such cases we see the working-class as being the instigators of mass protests and strikes against government. It is with such workers that radicalism can be most clearly seen.

“There is a lack of democracy in many non-CLAC unions.”

One of the recurring criticisms made by the CLAC of mainstream unions is their essential lack of democracy. It is argued that the use of union funds to support political causes has the potential of violating the consciences of the membership. Members may vote and give their energies to a variety of diverse political parties and causes. To devote funds to supporting just one of these parties is essentially undemocratic. To back up this theory one interviewee mentioned the case of the federal riding in Oshawa that was held by former NDP leader Ed Broadbent. When Broadbent, a “good politician,” retired, the NDP lost the seat thus showing that the membership did not respond affirmatively to the unions’ advice when they went to the voting box.<sup>108</sup> The CLAC says that they respect the wishes of their diverse membership by being

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<sup>107</sup> I have chronicled these events previously. R.G.Thomas (2001).

<sup>108</sup> Author interview with Ed Grootenboer. It may be debatable to what extent the federal riding of Oshawa was by that point a “union” riding. It is certainly the case that union members often vote for parties other than those supported by their union. However, this in itself does not necessarily mean the union’s officials are acting in an undemocratic manner. If these officials were at one point elected by the membership then they are making decisions based on a democratic mandate.



“politically engaged but non-partisan”<sup>109</sup> in their approach to government. But just how democratic is the CLAC itself? By what criteria do we measure this concept? Other unions have critiqued the CLAC with the very accusation that it throws at mainstream unions. Paul Forder, director of organising for the Canadian Autoworkers (CAW), has argued that: [PF quotation]. The first test one can make of a union’s democratic character is to be found on the paper of its constitution. We will examine this forthwith.

The constitution of the CLAC lays out the structure of the union. The locals of the union form a board which is elected by the members of the local. The CLAC representative sits on the board as an ex-officio member and is eligible to be elected as an officer of the local. CLAC representatives also act as authorised agents of the local for the negotiation and administration of collective agreements on behalf of the members.<sup>110</sup> The officials of the board are elected for three year renewable terms with one third of positions becoming vacant annually. The election is by ballot and the successful candidate must win a majority of the votes cast. Where a majority is not obtained a run-off election shall be held. The local board chooses the slate of candidates based on a preset criteria (length of local membership, length of CLAC membership, service as steward or bargaining committee member, positive contribution to the local). The local must remit its dues monthly to the national treasurer. Most expenses are paid through the national office and must be “properly authorised by a CLAC representative”. Any local events (eg. social events) must be funded in addition to the regular member dues through the levying of a surcharge. There is a

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<sup>109</sup> Author interview with Gideon Strauss. Strauss argues that the union may get involved in lobbying for workplace issues but must not do so by playing party politics.

<sup>110</sup> Constitution of the Christian Labour Association of Canada and its affiliated locals, hereafter the Constitution, sections 8.01, 8.04, 8.05.

clear democratic character to the election of officers for the local. Officials, with the exception of the CLAC representative, are elected by majority vote. However, there are serious restrictions on what the local board can do. Funds are held by the national treasurer and can only be released for expenses approved by the CLAC representative. Further these funds are released only for the expenses arising from the collective bargaining process and its implementation. Strike action is similarly democratic in that the local membership in a bargaining unit may vote to take strike action but this vote must be approved by the National Board,<sup>111</sup> thereby undercutting any apparent democratic choice. Therefore, the democratic character of the CLAC on a local level is more theoretical than real.

The National Board must operate in harmony with both the constitution of the union and the decisions of the National Convention. The board shall consist of at least seven members drawn from the union's locals. It will attempt to have a turnover of close to half of the board members every biennial convention year. The successors to the national board members will be elected at the National Convention. The choice of candidates will be made by the National Board itself from names of individuals nominated by the various locals.<sup>112</sup> The need for the approval of the current board for the slate of candidates makes it seem unlikely that an individual who had a considerably different view of unionism would ever be elected. It is actually expressly stated that the individuals selected for election should be "qualified to give leadership that is in harmony with this Constitution and must agree fully with the Basis, Aims, Principles, and Practices set forth in

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<sup>111</sup> Constitution, section 9.14.

<sup>112</sup> The Constitution, sections 9.02 and 9.03.

this Constitution.”<sup>113</sup> Such agreement leaves little room for radically challenging the union’s direction on the slate of candidates for election. Even if by some odd occurrence a maverick member was able to gain a seat on the National Board there is still no guarantee their voice would not be silenced. For there is a provision that if he fails to “uphold this Constitution” he can be removed by the majority vote of the National Board.<sup>114</sup> Once again it seems as though the rhetoric of democratic unionism rings hollow.

A truly democratic constitution needs to be able to leave room for dissent and the hearing of alternative voices in the places of power in the union. It must leave room for individual locals to take charge of their own affairs and make the decisions that the membership deems in its best interest. In failing to give the locals this independence the CLAC seems to leave the door open for paternalistic interference. In order to be truly democratic the union would have to leave in local hands more control over its own finances and the final decision to call a strike vote. This could even conceivably be done without violating the aim of the CLAC to avoid strikes. The locals could be forced by the Constitution to offer binding arbitration before any strike takes place. After this they would be left to make the strike decision on their own without interference. The Constitution is crafted in such a way that the National Board is given the ability to recreate itself in its own image every election. At least on paper the CLAC comes to mimic a caricature of the mainstream unions that the CLAC has criticised.

### Conclusions:

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<sup>113</sup>The Constitution, section 9.03.

<sup>114</sup>The Constitution, section 13.13.

Will the CLAC continue its modest growth? Will its growth stagnate or will it become an important contender in the Canadian labour movement? The answers to these questions resides in the CLAC's ability to provide good or even exceptional service to its members. The union must be able to bargain competitive collective agreements with employers, especially in its traditional areas of strength in the construction and healthcare industries. Further, it needs to prove itself capable of servicing its members' needs on a day-to-day basis in the workplace in terms of education, grievance arbitration and benefits, etc.. With the union's benefit programmes and developing training programmes for stewards and members in the construction industry, the union may be on the right track. However, this direction can only be proven in the long term.

The ideological issues that arise with the union are another matter that needs to be discussed. The union's decidedly conservative stances on many issues such as pay equity, political partisanship and raiding stand at odds with much of the broader labour movement. Will the union be able to maintain such stances while faced with a changing membership that is gradually being extended more and more outside of the CLAC's traditional area of strength in the construction industry? I believe that this issue is tied hand-in-hand with the ability of the union to deliver on its economic promises in the workplace and collective bargaining spheres. The chances that well-serviced workers will revolt against the union is highly unlikely. Conversely, poorly serviced workers will not stay long within the union or failing this will pressure the leadership for significant changes in the union's direction. This will be the deciding factor that determines the union's success or failure.

The anomaly of a "Christian" union in the Canadian industrial relations scene must be also questioned. Originally, the union came into existence in a Dutch immigrant sub-culture. These

Dutchmen were deeply religious and desired that their values be transferred into collective bargaining in the workplace. In the year 2002, the union's constituency reflects a very different makeup. Besides being in a more ethnically diverse country, it also exists in a far more openly secular one. How long can such a religious formation exist in the present day milieu? The ability to maintain a religious union in a secular Canada will depend on the union's leadership. The leaders of the union have the tools in the union's constitution to recreate a National Board with similar values as the outgoing one. This ability can be used almost indefinitely to maintain the religious status quo within the organisation. However, the fragility of human life points to the fact that the leadership will one day have to retire and will in turn be replaced by younger men and women of a different generation. What effect these men and women will have on the direction of the union is not known. But one would suspect a union that is more secular and modern. One can already see this change in the styles of the union's education directors. Harry Antonides, who retired in 1997, focused his research on polemics and the ideological defense and laying out of Christian unionism. Gideon Strauss seems to be far more interested in a role of "education" of a more traditional variety, i.e., training members of the rank-in-file to better serve the union. The Guide also exhibits the changes of the union over the last few decades. Gone are the polemics, the articles of ministers of the church and the frequent references to the Scriptures. This magazine still reflects a union that is frankly different than so-called mainstream unions. However, it is a union that is gradually secularising as the second generation of leaders begins to retire.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> The original generation of the union was that which was around at the foundation. The group that led the union after 1958 continued, in many cases, to lead the union until the late 1990s. Some of the present leadership, such as Ed Grootenboer, has been in the union since the early 1970s.

The future of the CLAC remains to be written. I strongly doubt it will be as promising as its founders imagined. Its originality is strongly circumscribed by the state, present crises and promise of the broader labour movement. But it will not be as short lived or detrimental to working-class aspirations as its detractors would lead us to believe.

## Appendix I: Methodological Notes.

The CLAC is a small Canadian union and there is a paucity of secondary published sources covering its history and practices. Therefore it was necessary to rely heavily on two groups of sources. The union's own publications, especially The Guide magazine, were consulted in order to get a picture of the union's history. Secondly, several leaders from the union were chosen to be interviewed. These individuals were chosen especially to get a broad spectrum of the union leadership. There was a founding member of the CLAC, a former National Director, a regional representative, the educational director and finally the representative responsible for the Univision marketing case.

It was hoped that representatives of mainstream unions that had jurisdictional disputes with the CLAC would be able to discuss these disputes in interviews. There were repeated attempts to gain access to potential interviewees from within the construction industry. However, these eventually failed. The only non-CLAC leader to be interviewed was Paul Forder from the CAW. The usefulness of this interview was restricted due to the limited interaction between the CAW and CLAC.

The interviewing of rank-and-file CLAC members would have also added to what the thesis could have covered. For example, workers in the healthcare and construction industry could have added their voice to how the union operated. However, due to a lack of time, this was not possible.

The following individuals were interviewed for this study:

### Gerald Vandezande

Gerald was one of the original members of the CLAC. He came to Canada from the Netherlands in his late teens in the late 1940s. His parents were friends with Mr. Frans Fukyschot and it was through this connection that he became involved with the CLAC. He was the first paid employee of the CLAC after the union was ordered certified by the Ontario Supreme Court in 1963. He served for a time as the executive director of the organisation before giving over the reins of power to Ed Vanderkloet in 1972. After this time he went on to become a leading member of the Toronto based Committee for Liberty and Justice which later became known as Citizens for Public Justice. It was through this work that Vandezande has become best known. In the late 1990s he became a companion of the Order of Canada for his years of public service.

### Ed Grootenboer

Ed became a member of the CLAC staff in the early 1970s. He has served a number of positions within the organisation including a member of the national executive board, executive director and as editor of the Guide the official magazine of the CLAC.

Hank Beekhuis

Hank has been with the CLAC since the early 1970s. He presently serves as an Ontario representative at the Grimsby regional office.

Peter Vanderkloet.

Peter works at the CLAC's Mississauga office as a representative of the union at various workplaces. He deals with all aspects of bargaining and the grievances of members. He was the CLAC representative that dealt with the Univision Marketing case.

Dr. Gideon Strauss.

Gideon received his master's and doctorate in Philosophy from the University of the Orange Free State in South Africa. He has been involved for many years in social justice issues including the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. Since 1999 he has been the research and education director of the CLAC.

Paul Forder.

Paul is head of organising for the Canadian Autoworkers and works out of their North York, Ontario head office.



## Appendix Two: Interview Questions.

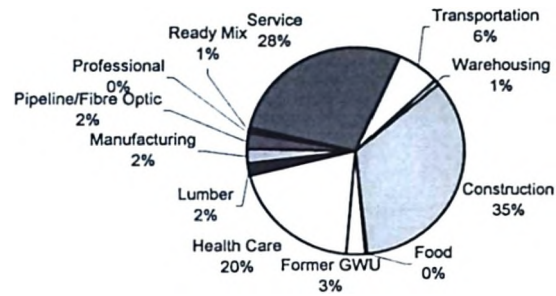
### Interview Guideline for Christian Labour Association of Canada (CLAC) Representatives

1. How did you first become involved with the Christian Labour Association of Canada?
2. Could you please tell me about the history of the CLAC. I am interested in how and why it was created and in what you consider to be the important aspects of its evolution.
3. How does the CLAC see the role of unions in Canadian society?
4. Does being a “Christian Union” make the CLAC different from other unions?
5. What is CLAC’s approach to collective bargaining?
6. Does this approach differ from that of other unions?
7. With regard to CLAC’s purposes and goals, what have been your organization’s priorities when it comes to organizing workers?
8. How successful has CLAC been in achieving its organizing goals? Have you been more successful in some areas than in others? If so, why do you think this is the case?
9. How successful has the CLAC been in negotiating contracts with employers? What have been the most important issues? Have you been more successful in some areas than in others. If so, why do you think this is the case?
10. In most jurisdictions the CLAC has managed to avoid strikes throughout its history. In many people’s minds, strikes are a key feature of the unionism that has developed in Canada. Please explain both the reasoning behind the CLAC’s avoidance of strikes and how you believe this effects the success of the union’s bargaining with employers.
11. A few years ago there was considerable media coverage of the CLAC with regard to its representation of a group of employees at Univision Marketing. Could you outline your understanding of these events.
12. Over the years, what is your organization’s relationship been like with other unions? Has this relationship changed over the years in any way?
13. What are CLAC’s organizing and negotiating priorities for the next period?

Interview Guideline for Questions for [Non-CLAC] Union Representatives.

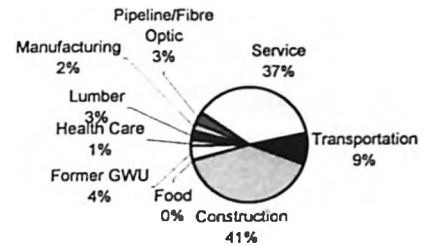
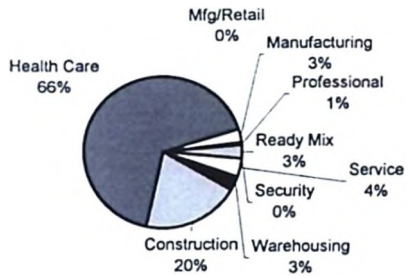
1. These questions are hoped to bring forth an understanding of the Christian Labour Association of Canada (the CLAC) and how this union relates to other unions and how other unions' officials view the CLAC's representation of its own membership and the effectiveness thereof. I would like to start by asking you what relationship and interactions you and/or (your union) have had with the CLAC?
2. Your union has had numerous jurisdictional with the CLAC. Could you describe what some of these cases have generally focused on?
3. From time to time unions are involved in jurisdictional disputes with other unions. Would you consider the CLAC's relationship with other unions any different from inter-union relations between other unions? Why? Why not?
4. From your experience with the CLAC how would you explain the effectiveness of the representation of its membership?
5. From what you have seen of the CLAC's organizing and representation of membership, how would you describe their relationships with the employers with they enter into collective agreements? In your opinion, how does this differ, if at all, from the relationships between your union and the employers it is in collective agreements with?
6. (If the representative has knowledge of the Univision Marketing case) One labour dispute where the CLAC received great attention involved the Univision Marketing case. What do you know about this case? How do you feel the CLAC dealt with this case effectively or ineffectively? Explain.
7. Are there any other specific cases you can think of that the CLAC represented its membership with effectiveness or ineffective failings? Explain.

nada



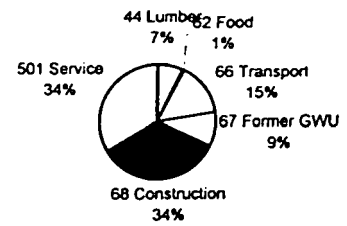
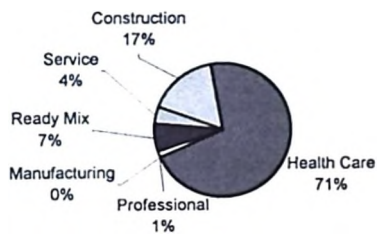
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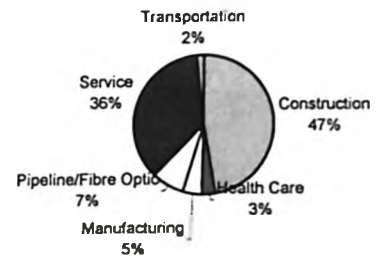
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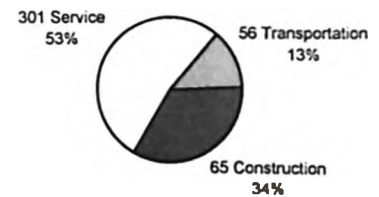
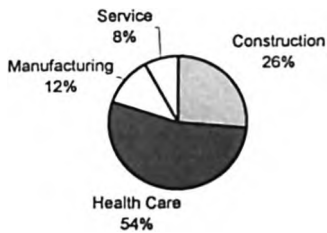
Mississauga

Edmonton



Chatham

Calgary



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