
In Critical Solidarity

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Section on Labor and Labor Movements

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ASA Preview

Understanding Canada's Labor Movements

Ian Robinson

The most important thing to understand about Canada's labor movement is that it has long been two national labor movements. One is based in Quebec, where French is the primary language; the other is based in the rest of Canada (ROC for short), where English is the *lingua franca*. Language has never been far from politics – including labor politics – in modern Canada. But the two movements are distinguished by more than the language that most of their members and leaders normally speak. At root, they have distinct and, to some extent, incompatible *projets de société*.

The difference at this level does not rest primarily in their conception of a just economic and political order. Most of the influential leaders of both labor movements endorse something like Scandinavian-style social democracy and support political parties that promise to move the country in this direction. The difference in the two projects is that the ROC movement wants to bring about these changes in Canada, as it is currently constituted, including Quebec; by contrast, the dominant tendency in the Quebec movement wants to realize these reforms in an independent and sovereign Quebec which, they sometimes point out, would have a population similar to that of Sweden.

Most of Quebec's top labor leaders are strongly committed to Quebec sovereignty, believing that independence will make it much easier to implement fully their economic and social reform agenda. Quebec's union leaders and activists have been the single most powerful component of the broad social movement for Quebec sovereignty
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Membership Drive: Breaking the 400 Member Barrier

The current membership of the Labor and Labor Movements Section is at 365—only 35 short of 400 members. 400 members would not only allow us to have 3 section-organized sessions at the 2007 meetings in NYC, but would also cross an important symbolic barrier. Only one third of the ASA sections have fewer than 400 members—mainly newer or "oddball" sections. Getting over 400 would make it clear that Labor and Labor Movements is going to be a central part of the discipline.

This is the second year in a row we have been tantalizingly close to the 400 mark, but this year, starting before the ASA convention with only 35 to go, we should be able to do it. After all, this is a section that is about organizing!

So, please make sure that all your friends and comrades with interests in labor have signed up for the section, especially students who may not be aware that it only costs \$17 per year to become a member of the ASA and only \$5 additional to join our section. Senior members may wish to consider sponsoring graduate students in their departments.

Point potential members to the ASA website (asanet.org) where they should click the "Join or Renew" button on the left. It's pretty simple. If you are not already an ASA member, you can join online. If you are already an ASA member but haven't signed up for the section, it allows you to add a section membership.

We can do it!
Si se puede!

-Peter Evans

<cont.> since its emergence in the 1960s. They have also backed the *Parti Québécois* (PQ), created in the same decade to realize Quebec sovereignty. This larger project of national liberation (as the sovereigntists see it) links the Quebec labor movement with a broader social movement community.

Because Quebec labor movement leaders have backed the PQ, the social democratic party backed by the ROC labor movement – the New Democratic Party (NDP) – never wins many votes or any seats in Quebec, the second most populous province in the country. This is the most important way in which the two *projets de société*, despite their common social democratic orientation, are at odds with one another. This incoherence is manifest most powerfully at the level of national politics, where the NDP has never come close to forming a government. However, the costs of this incoherence are lower at the provincial level.

In Quebec, the PQ has formed the provincial government more often than not since it first came to power in 1976. The NDP has formed provincial governments many times in the prairie provinces of Saskatchewan and Manitoba, several times in British Columbia, and once in Canada's most populous province, Ontario. Canada's universal single-payer health care system was pioneered by one such Saskatchewan government, from the late 1950s to the late 1960s. Other provinces emulated its example once they saw that it worked, and the federal government eventually got on board with shared-cost grants for any program that met certain conditions.

Province-level victories by labor movement-allied parties are the proximate cause of the more favorable labor law that now prevails in Quebec and ROC, compared with the United States. (Fortunately for Canada's unions, Canada's more decentralized federal structure assigns primary responsibility for labor legislation to provincial governments, rather than the federal government, where labor has much less influence.) Better labor laws, better enforced by stronger unions, are an important reason why union density in Canada today is about 30 percent – 35 percent in Quebec – as opposed to 12 percent in the United States. (This, despite the fact that, according to the 1996 Lipset & Meltz survey, about the same share of Canadians and Americans – majorities in each case – want to be union members.)

New Publications of Interest

Keith M. Kilty and Elizabeth A. Segal (eds), *The Promise of Welfare Reform: Political Rhetoric and the Reality of Poverty in the Twenty-First Century* (Haworth Press, 2006).

Christine Williams, *Inside Toyland: Working, Shopping, and Social Inequality* (UC Press, 2006).

Christian Zolniski, *Janitors, Street Vendors and Activists* (UC Press, 2006).

Dan Zuberi, *Differences That Matter: Social Policy and the Working Poor in the United States and Canada* (Cornell University/ILR Press 2006).

*Send your publication announcements to the editor at rachel.sherman@yale.edu

But it is important to remember that it was not always so. In the 1930s, Canada's Great Depression was at least as long and deep as that in the United States. Moreover, it was unmitigated by a Canadian New Deal. There was no equivalent of the Social Security Act, the Wagner Act, or the Fair Labor Standards Act at the federal or provincial levels. Canadian union density in the 1930s was even lower than that in the United States. However, due to World War Two and full employment, organizing in Canada took off. By the end of the war, union density in Canada equaled that of the United States (when the latter was at its all-time peak).

How did Canada's unions achieve this without favorable labor laws and social policies? The answer has important implications for the U.S. labor movement at a time when it, like Canada in the 1930s, has very low union density and very weak legal protections for workers and their unions.

The absence of a Canadian New Deal meant that union activists had to learn how to organize successfully without Wagner-type legal supports. As U.S. unions are discovering today, this context pushes unions to develop strategies that stress <continued p. 7>

ASA Special Sessions & Events

Thematic Sessions

Globalizing Capital, Globalizing Labor . . . Globalizing Labor Movements?

Sunday August 13, 2:30pm - 4:10pm

Organizer and Presider:

Daniel B. Cornfield (Vanderbilt University)

Panelists:

Janice Fine (School of Management and Labor Relations, Rutgers University)

Steven Greenhouse (*New York Times*)

Lowell Turner (School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Cornell University)

The Future of the Labor Movement in North America: Can Unions Rebuild?

Monday, August 14, 2:30-4:10 pm

Co-Chairs:

Ruth Milkman (UCLA)

Dan Clawson (U-Mass, Amherst)

Panelists:

Stewart Acuff, Organizing Director, AFL-CIO

Gerald Hudson, Vice President, Service

Employees International Union

Hassan Yussuff, Secretary-Treasurer, Canadian Labour Congress

Author Meets Critics

Monday, August 14, 8:30-10:10 am

Organizer and Presider: Ruth Milkman (UCLA)

Author: Steven H. Lopez, Ohio State University, *Reorganizing the Rust Belt: An Inside Study of the American Labor Movement* (UC Press, 2004)

Critics:

Elizabeth A. Armstrong (Indiana University)

Rick Fantasia (Smith College)

Ian Robinson (University of Michigan)

Edward Webster (University of the Witwatersrand)

Gala Reception

*Sunday, August 13, 2006
6:30pm*

1601 de Lorimier Avenue, Montreal, head office of the Confédération des syndicats nationaux (CSN- confederation of national unions)

Refreshments will be preceded by a short presentation on the history and the situation of Quebec unionism.

Organizer: Rick Fantasia

Section and Regular Sessions

All sessions will take place at the Palais des congrès de Montréal.

I. Labor Strategies, New and Old

Saturday, 8:30-10:10 am

Chris Tilly (University of Massachusetts Lowell), Organizer
Janice Fine (Rutgers University), Presider

“Between the Office, Court and Street: A Case Study of Labor Contentions Politics in Central China,” Xiuying Cheng (University of California -- Berkeley)

“Individual Needs Versus Collective Interests: Network Dynamics in the Freelance Editorial Association,” Debra J. Osnowitz (Brandeis University)

“Students Against Sweatshops: Understanding the Campus-Based Movement,” Peter Dreier (Occidental College)

“The Political Economy of Union Organizational Effort and Success in the U.S., 1949-2004,” Andrew Stephen Fullerton (University of Connecticut), Michael E. Wallace (University of Connecticut)

“Lessons from the 1981 PATCO Strike, Labor's ‘Perfect Storm’: A Unionist's Perspective,” Arthur B. Shostak (Drexel University)

II. Labor and the University

Sunday, 8:30-10:10 am

Chris Rhomberg (Yale University), Organizer and Chair

“A Tale of Two ‘Unorganizables.’” Jonathan Isler (University of California-Davis)

“The Rise of Contingent Labor and Unionization in Higher Education: U.S. Trends and their Implications.” Ian Robinson, Dave Dobbie, and Rachel Burrage (University of Michigan)

“Teaching Solidarity: The Graduate Employee Strike at NYU, 2005-2006.” Mikaila Arthur (New York University)

III. Redefining the Global Worker: Going Beyond Formal Employment in Theorizing and Organizing

Sunday, 4:30 pm

Heidi Gottfried, Organizer

“Proletarianization, the Informal Proletariat and ‘Marx’ in the Era of Globalization” Wai Kit Choi, (University of California-Irvine)

“Standard for Whom? Standard for What? The Regulation of Agricultural Labor in Chile and Its Gendered Effects” Carmen Bain (Michigan State University)

“The ‘Global Working Day’ and the ‘Global Worker,’ Globalization and the Politics of Food, Farshad Araghi (Florida Atlantic University)

“Who's Afraid of MFA? Women's multiple income generating strategies, Dhaka,” Kathryn Ward (Southern Illinois University), Rifat Akhter (Southern Illinois University), Kazi Rafiqul Islam, (Nari Jibon Project, Dhaka)

Discussant: Gay Seidman

IV. The Labor Movement in Coalitions

Monday, 4:30-6:10 pm

Chris Tilly (University of Massachusetts Lowell), Organizer and Presider

“Mobilizing Against Unemployment: Unions, the Unemployed, and a Precarious Balance of Interests,” Annulla U.M. Linders (University of Cincinnati)

“Movements, Countermovements, and Policy Adoption: The Case of Right-to-Work Activism,” Marc Dixon (Florida State University)

“School Custodians and Green Cleaners: New Approaches to Labor-Environment Coalitions,” Laura Senier, Brian Mayer, Phil Brown, Rachel Morello-Frosch (Brown University)

“The Limits of the Service Employees International Union's Social Movement Unionism,” Lynn May Rivas (University of California)

Section Roundtables

Sunday, 10:30 am
Palais des congrès de Montréal

Table 01. Labor and Worker Consciousness

Discussant: Jeff Sallaz, University of Arizona

“Blue-Collar Aristocrats? General Motors Autoworkers and Oppositional Class Consciousness.” *Reuben Roth, Laurentian University*

“‘Right-Sizing’ the Middle Class: Downsizing Older Workers.” *G. Baird, Georgia State University*

Organizational Efficacy in Labor Unions.
Tracy Chang, Univ. of Alabama-Birmingham

Table 02. Historical Sociology of Labor Movements

Discussant: Linda Majka, University of Dayton

“A Function of Racism: The Failure of Mexican and Filipino Strike Waves in California Agriculture, 1933-1939.” *Adrian Cruz, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign*

“Organized Labor and the Resistance to Border Formation in Yugoslavia, 1980-1989.” *Jake Lowinger, Johns Hopkins University*

“The Historical Origins of Outsourcing and Union Crisis within the US Auto Industry: Organized Labor’s Self-Determination?” *Maria Gritsch, UCLA*

Table 03. Labor Movement Strategy

Discussant: Chris Tilly, U Mass- Lowell

“Solving Local Grievances with International Corporate Campaign.” *Edwin Brown and Tracy Chang, Univ. of Alabama-Birmingham*

“South African Debates on the Basic Income Grant: Decommodification and the Post-Apartheid Social Policy.” *Franco Barchiesi, Ohio State University*

“Taming Dinosaurs? Social Structures and Strategies Leading to Corporate Social Responsibility.” *Joe Bandy, Bowdoin College*

Table 04. Labor Movements and States

Discussant: Theo Majka, University of Dayton

“Labor Discipline and Frontier Development in the Periphery: Comparing the Development and Consolidation of Capitalist Production in Three Regions of Colombia.” *Phillip Hough, Johns Hopkins University*

“‘Welfare for Human Harmony’ - Japanese Labor Welfare in Law and Practice, 1947-1985.” *Scott North, Osaka University*

“The politics of labor unions laws policy-making in Argentina.” *Marcela Gonzalez, University of Maryland*

Table 05. Labor as a Social Movement

Discussant: Andrew Martin, The Ohio State University

“Density Matters: Implications of Union Density for the Sociology of Labor Revitalization.” *Richard Sullivan, Illinois State University*

“Strike Predictors in the Contemporary United States.” *Jake Rosenfeld, Princeton University*

Informal Discussion Roundtables

The Future of National Labor Movements in the United States and Canada

Sat, Aug 12 - 12:30pm - 2:10pm

Discussion Leader: George P. Mason (Wayne State University)

Co-Leader: Kim Scipes (Purdue University North Central)

Strikes and the Labor Movement

Sat, Aug 12 - 12:30pm - 2:10pm

Carolina Bank Muñoz (Brooklyn College-CUNY)- Race and the 2005 New York Transit Strike

Penelope W. Lewis (CUNY Graduate Center)- Vietnam Era Strikes and the Class Dynamics of the Antiwar Movement

Belinda C. Lum (University of Southern California, Los Angeles), Moderator

*Take-along guide
to ASA labor-related
sessions and events*

All events will take place at the Palais des congrès de Montréal, except as noted. Please check your ASA information for room locations and last-minute changes.

Saturday, August 12

Regular session: Labor Strategies, New and Old, 8:30-10:10 am

Informal discussion roundtable: Strikes and the Labor Movement, 12:30- 2:10pm

Informal discussion roundtable: The Future of National Labor Movements in the United States and Canada, 12:30pm - 2:10pm

Sunday, August 13

Section session: Labor and the University, 8:30-10:10 am

Section roundtables, 10:30-11:30 am

Business meeting, 11:30 am-12:10 pm

Thematic Session: Globalizing Capital, Globalizing Labor, Globalizing Labor Movements? 2:30pm - 4:10pm

Section session: Redefining the Global Worker, 4:30 pm

Section reception, 6:30 p.m.
1601 de Lorimier Avenue, Montreal.

Monday, August 14

Author Meets Critics (Steven Lopez, *Reorganizing the Rust Belt*), 8:30-10:10 am

Thematic Session: The Future of the Labor Movement in North America, 2:30-4:10 pm

Regular session: The Labor Movement in Coalitions, 4:30-6:10 pm

And the Winner Is...

Distinguished Scholarly Article Award:

Winner: Tamara Kay, "Labor Transnationalism and Global Governance: The Impact of NAFTA on Transnational Labor Relationships in North America" (AJS 2005).

Honorable Mention: Ben Cornwell and Jill Harrison, "Union Members and Voluntary Associations: Membership Overlap as a Case of Organizational Embeddedness" (ASR 2004).

Most Outstanding Student Paper Award:

Winner: Barry Eidlin, "State Coercion and the Rise of U.S. Business Unionism: The Counterfactual Case of Minneapolis Teamsters, 1934-1941"

Finalists: Jackie Gabriel, "Si se puede: Organizing Latino Immigrant Workers in South Omaha's Meatpacking Industry"; Cesar Rodriguez-Garavito, "Global Governance and Labor Rights: Codes of Conduct and Anti-Sweatshop Struggles in Global Apparel Factories in Mexico and Guatemala"

**Awards will be presented at the Section
Business Meeting, Sunday 11:30 am**

Please join us!

**For more information and other
sessions of interest, please check
the section website:**

<http://www.laborstudies.wayne.edu/ASA/>

<cont. from p.2> alliances with other community actors and heavier reliance on union rank-and-file education, commitment, volunteerism and mobilization.

Canada's relatively hostile legal environment also gave the advantage to organizing efforts that could be coordinated strategically across the country by national and international socialist and communist party organizations (and, in Quebec, by the Catholic Church in addition to these other organizations). The environment also created a strong bias in favor of organizers moved by the kind of powerful ideological commitments that membership in these organizations developed. The United Mine Workers used its resources to build the United Steel Workers in the USA, but neither it nor the CIO had much money for organizing efforts in Canada. There, socialist and communist organizers did most of that work, much as they built the United Auto Workers (UAW) in Michigan.

The small number of business agents and international reps that Canada's international craft unions could field were no match for such organizers, even when employers favored the craft unions (as they did in both countries, because they rightly perceived them to be less threatening). By the end of World War Two, Canada's new industrial unions had marginalized the old craft unions affiliated with the AFL and its Canadian equivalent, the Trades and Labor Congress. In US terms, it was as though most CIO unions went through a formative process like the UAW and emerged with leaders ranging from Walter and Victor Reuther to Saul Wellman; and at the same time, these CIO unions overshadowed the AFL unions, in membership numbers and in mobilization capacity – in internal labor politics as well as wider national politics – in 1945, 1955 and beyond.

There were Cold War purges in Canada, as in the United States, in the late 1940s and early 1950s. As a result, communist labor leaders and activists who helped to build Canada's industrial unions lost much of their influence. Eleven CIO unions were expelled from the Congress of Canadian Labour (the name of the Canadian federation of CIO unions) because their members would not repudiate communist leaders. As in the U.S., the expelled unions were then raided and most were destroyed (though the United Electrical Workers and Mine, Mill & Smelter Workers remained relatively strong in Canada for many years). The difference, though, was that those who did the expelling in Canada's

CIO unions were, for the most part, socialists. In ROC, the cold warriors were mostly affiliated with the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation, the precursor to the NDP. In Quebec, the Catholic union federation, which had become more secular and more radical over the 30s and 40s, increased its influence within the movement. Thus, the dominant tendency within the leadership of the Canadian labor movement remained ideologically committed to social and economic transformation even after the communist purges.

Again, the UAW is useful for putting this point in terms familiar to a U.S. audience. In that union, Reuther and his caucus controlled the union following the purges. As a consequence, the UAW was the largest union to espouse what became known as social unionism. But the UAW was the exception to the rule in the United States. By the time the CIO merged with the much larger AFL in 1955, Reuther's social unionism was a minority current in the American labor movement. Will current U.S. conditions promote social movement unionism in this country, as they did in Canada in the 1930s and 1940s? I've addressed this question elsewhere. In a nutshell, I think that, while these conditions do not make its growth inevitable, they do nonetheless favor social movement unionism in the United States.

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