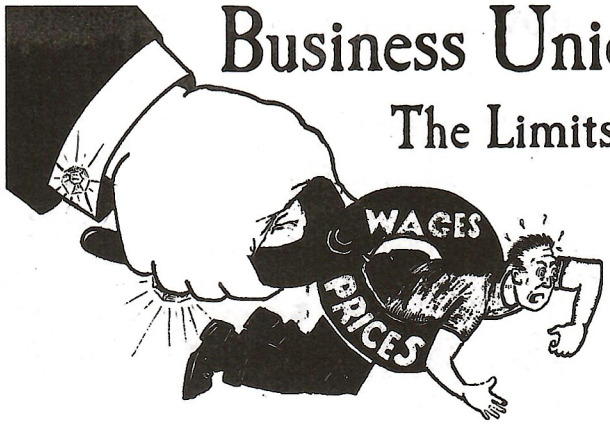
Business Unionism by any other name:
The Limits of Social Unionism in Canada



BY JEFF SHANTZ

Much has been made of social unionism in Canada as an alternative form of unionism which can combine successful bargaining with community-based action. Unions such as the Canadian Auto Workers and the Canadian Union of Public Employees, the main champions of social unionism in Canada, claim to reject business unionism, with its strict focus on wages and benefits, in favor of an approach that "is sensitive to broader concerns, and that contribute[s] to those in need in the community and internationally" (Ginden, 1995, 266). Notably the CAW is the largest private sector union in Canada, while CUPE is the largest union in the country. Proponents of social unionism can point to real gains, including Paid Education Leave (PEL, an employer-paid education program for workers), reducing overtime to get new workers in for shifts, equity improvements, and work refusals over racial and sexual harassment.

Some commentators (see Rueben Roth, 1997) herald social unionism as an alternative model that shows the future of an engaged, socially rooted activist union movement which might revitalize the labor movement as a whole. In his article on flying squads and workers' self-activity, Alex Levant (2003, 22) distinguishes between business union locals which, dominated by conservative leaders, contribute to the crisis of working-class self-organization and social unions which make unions part of struggles for social justice in his plea for unions to embrace flying squads.

Social unionism supposedly provides the basis to return unions to the center of social change and progressive political action in Canada. There is much expectation that social unions will play a leading role in the foundation of a militant left in Canada. Unfortunately social unionism has not met the expectations many have for its role as a revitalizing force in the labor movement in Canada.

In the face of massive social attacks on poor people, immigrants and refugees, unemployed workers, women, seniors and children, and indeed unionized workers, the union movement in Canada has offered little effective response. Social unionism has not been anything even approximating a militant force or change or community defence. Instead social union leaders wring their hands and sigh over "this human tragedy" of neoliberalism without being able to grasp even "who exactly is organizing it" (Hargrove, 1998, 74-75). Meanwhile they condemn the community groups that put up a real fight to stop the tragedy from happening.

The fundamental limits of social unionism in Canada are related to three main problems: a hierarchical and conciliatory bargaining model for action; electoralism and commitment to social democratic pressure politics through boycotts, symbolic protests and political lobbying, especially through the New Democratic Party (NDP); and a charitable approach to community groups coupled with a paternalistic relation with social movements.

I should point out that, in what follows, when I speak of social unions or social unionists I am referring to the leadership and staff of the unions who still largely determine the direction, policy and practices of the unions. I have nothing but the utmost respect for the rank-and-file members who have struggled, and continue to struggle, often in the face of stiff resistance, to build movements that are engaged in truly grassroots social struggles based in mutual solidarity and militant resistance to the bosses and the state. I discuss some of these efforts to build a solidarity unionism that rejects the hierarchy and authoritarianism of business unionism.

This is no outsider's perspective. I grew up in CAW (UAW) Local 444, a flagship of social unionism in Canada and the local that Buzz Hargrove came out of. I have been a rank-and-file CUPE member for a decade or so.

Roots in Barren Soil: Canadian Social Unionism and the Legacy of Reutherism

To properly understand social unionism in Canada it is helpful to look at its roots. Some (see Roth, 1997) claim that social unionism in Canada is fundamentally rooted in more democratic and participatory structures and visions than are found in U.S. unions. Indeed this is an explanation given to account for not only social union practices but also for the CAW break from the UAW.

In reality, however, Canadian social unionism is explicitly based in the Reutherism of the postwar UAW. CAW national leader Buzz Hargrove suggests that the CAW's social unionism was learned at the feet of Walter Reuther, whom Hargrove describes as "the most progressive union leader in North America" (Hargrove, 1998, 68). For many rank-and-file UAW militants with whom I have spoken, people who were active prior to Reuther's election and through his tenure as leader, the impression is much different.

Reuther ruled the roost at the UAW as national president from 1946 until his death in 1970. Reuther came to national prominence during WWII with his plan for industry-wide conversion of auto plants to war production. Upon assuming power Reuther fired 75 staff members and the head of the legal department all of whose loyalty to Reuther was deemed to be in question. With staff brought under his control Reuther set about purging the UAW of communist members and other militants from the union bureaucracy.

His attack did not simply target communists but came down against progressive militants of various stripes. Throughout his

rule Reuther "reinforced the red-baiting that was seething in American society and used it to isolate both the left and many of those who refused to 'choose sides' and denounce communists" (Gindin, 1995, 120). In this he was ruthless, leading witch-hunts throughout the union and even the CIO, "playing an active role in expelling unions which had democratically chosen to retain its left leadership" (121). Reuther's campaign went beyond an attempt to stamp out the left and constituted effort to achieve a total destruction of all opposition.

By eliminating radical opposition and forming broad cross-class alliances, including liberal members of the ruling class, Reuther was able to foreclose militancy within the UAW while making the union palatable to conservative America. The social unionism of Reuther consisted of company-paid health protection for members and their families, income protection policies for layoffs, pension benefits and some increased paid time off. This approach, pursued through Reuther's lobbying rather than a mobilized rank-and-file had rather serious consequences. Eventually "the union drifted towards establishing a 'parallel (or private) welfare state' for its members through collective bargaining. As a result, auto workers, having met their own needs, became less and less interested in joining others to fight for universal programs" (Gindin, 1995, 124).

Reuther directed a shift away from questions of workers' control towards an emphasis on workers as consumers. The reasons for this related to his liberal view of capitalist society and his strenuous anti-communism. Union focus on management control of working conditions "would inherently shift power to the locals, while Reuther was trying to centralize the union" (Gindin, 1995, 119). Furthermore, "a focus on increasing workers' purchasing power and benefits was a less radical demand since, unlike an emphasis on management rights, it didn't challenge property rights." The emphasis was on making gains within the system. This approach had other benefits for Reuther since "this strategy could even be articulated as a progressive weapon in the cold war: the most effective way to undercut communist arguments was to show that America delivered on its promises of greater benefits for all" (Gindin, 1995, 120). Thus Reuther satisfied management's greatest concern, keeping production free from workers' interference, while simultaneously putting workers' resources in the service of ruling class cold war ideologies.

Thus this social unionism, rather than being a hold out against the ravages of business unionism which had so demobilized the labor movement, played a crucial part in destroying the militancy of labor. As with other forms of business unionism it "brought out the worst in the membership and undermined the ability of the union to later carry out progressive work at its base" (Gindin, 1995, 121).

Reuther's version of social unionism was carried into the Canadian section of the UAW, prior to the CAW break-away, "challenging us to think about our responsibility to the poor, to ponder the inequitable situation of women workers, to consider the plight of workers of color, and to show respect for the communities in which we lived" (Hargrove, 1998, 68). The main assembly hall at the CAW's Port Elgin Family Education Centre, a union education facility that serves as a central example of social union progressivism for social union proponents, is named the Reuther Family Building.

The basic characteristics of Reuther's social unionism are evident in social unionism in Canada: seeking electoral "new deals" for workers and their communities, a top-down bargaining approach that foregoes struggles over workplace control and a limiting of independent rank-and-file movements. Consistent with Reutherism, all of this is carried out in the context of bureaucratic management of the union to make "gains within the system." As will be shown, rank-and-file militants, are still viewed with a great deal of suspicion and concern. While the heavy-handed crackdown on the left is not as apparent this is largely because in the current context of demobilization it does not yet have to be.

"Dialogue is the Mechanism": Social Unions seek a seat at the electoral table

Social unionism has also meant "as Reuther preached in the United States, that our members should look at politics as an extension of unionism" (Hargrove, 1998, 69). Social union leaders still maintain that there is a natural alliance between trade unionism and democratic socialism. A fundamental position of social unionism remains the belief that unions, through support for the New Democratic Party, can get someone at the political table to work in their interests.

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In Canada, a major part of social unionism has consisted of putting union resources into support for the New Democrats. The sizeable outlay of union resources includes labor for campaigning and canvassing, millions of dollars in donations and contributions to NDP propaganda work. Social unionists are encouraged to take on roles as political activists in the NDP. They play a key role in mobilizing support between elections. These efforts, however, have rarely translated into large-scale membership votes for the NDP.

So what have the social unions received as a result of this effort? Social unionists across the country were ecstatic with the election of the NDP provincially in Ontario in 1990. Their exclamation, "At long last the halls of power at Queen's Park would be open to working people" (Hargrove, 1998, 136), proved to be entirely illusory of course. NDP policies included tearing open public sector collective agreements and imposing a dozen unpaid days off as well as such mean spirited initiatives as a welfare snitch line. The party cut welfare while providing subsidies to businesses for "retraining." It called for union compromises with management, concessions and wage cuts while raising taxes for seniors and cutting taxes for business.

In fact when the NDP was elected in Ontario, the social unions advised the NDP not to do too much too soon for fear that it would "polarize the province." In the view of the social unions "moving too quickly and without proper consultation could actually be detrimental to labor's cause." Indeed the social unions were concerned to "show the business community that the NDP respected formal democratic processes" (Hargrove, 1998, 140). This would supposedly allow the NDP to avoid being accused of "ramming through pro-labor laws."

In February 1993 at a meeting of the NDP top cabinet members and various labor leaders, Judy Darcy, national president of CUPE, brought up the idea of a "social contract" that would allow for wage restraints on public service workers in exchange for some promise of job protection (as ratted out by Hargrove in *Labour of Love*). Thus one of the NDP's most despised pieces of anti-labour legislation, which tore open collective agreements and imposed wage concessions, was recommended by the president of the largest social union in Canada – the union that "represented" public service workers.

Throughout decades of attacks on poor and working people, extended by the neoliberal Tory government that succeeded the NDP in 1995, social unions still hold out some hope for constructive dialogue with governments, no matter how reactionary.

Bill 48 made the social contract a reality and stripped public sector unions of their bargaining rights. Wage rollbacks occurred through 12 compulsory unpaid days off, called contemptuously "Rae Days" by workers in honor of NDP Premier Bob Rae, for each worker for three years.

In the face of this planned attack by the NDP the other major social union, the CAW, only took the position that the concessions not be imposed unilaterally. The union should be allowed to bargain the cuts with management. The CAW leadership were even willing to forgive the NDP's other actions if they agreed to bargain public sector wage cuts. As Hargrove comments: "We don't care what's in it, so long as it's bargained... That's a system we in the CAW can always live with" (1998, 158).

The social union opposition to the social contract consisted of a press conference to warn the NDP that there would be trouble if existing collective agreements were overridden by a legislated settlement. The "trouble" ended up being a "withdrawal" of support for the NDP. No strikes, no general strike were planned in response. They would simply not endorse the government. They didn't even leave the party, they merely reduced funding to the base level required to maintain membership. A commitment was made to work with social movements to put pressure on the government.

This all points out the long-standing lie in Canadian labour politics that it was the business unions and their faithful commitment to the NDP that prevented any real mobilization against the NDP attacks on working people. It also shows vividly the deadliness of social union dependence on alliances with social democracy. Similar experiences have occurred under discredited and corrupt NDP governments in British Columbia and Saskatchewan.

The NDP "wanted business to see that here was a government that could finally deal with unions (that could get them to join in partnership with business. No Tory or Liberal government could ever do that" (Hagrove, 1998, 148-149). Still, knowing this the social unions continue to support the NDP.

Incredibly support for the NDP was maintained even as the party avoided seeking social union views on policy issues. The CAW offered the party a list of policy reforms that were disregarded by the party. Among the social union reform suggestions were asking provincial and municipal governments to pressure the federal government for expanded infrastructure spending, an incentive program for small business, and incredibly a "Buy Canadian" strategy for the provincial government. They also put forward suggestions for an "Ontario Development Bond, advertised as a "war bond," to "rebuild the provincial economy" by asking working people "to invest in their own and their children's future" (Hargrove, 1998, 145). Such are the visions of the social union leadership.

When the membership demanded that the CAW reconsider its affiliation with the NDP in 1998 the CAW national executive board, Hargrove's assistants and area directors debated the relationship with the NDP and decided to continue affiliation. No member decision or participation in the decisive "think-tank session." The reason given was that remaining in the NDP was necessary to ensure a strong, progressive voice representing Canadian workers.

Social unions in Canada still bemoan the lack of influence they have on any level of government. More fatally they hold out hope for a future day when they will exercise such influence, usually in the form of an election of the NDP to office. Unfortunately this is a sad and dangerous fantasy. As, at best, a liberal reform party, the NDP in power, wherever it has been in power, has been a friend of capital. More recently, in the face of NDP back-stabbing and Tory attacks, the CAW's commitment to finding the "parties that best represent labour" has led to absurd calls to vote for the ruling class Liberal Party in Ontario.

Throughout decades of attacks on poor and working people, extended by the neoliberal Tory government that succeeded the NDP in 1995, social unions still hold out some hope for constructive dialogue with governments, no matter how reactionary. "Dialogue... is the mechanism that provides the opportunity for progress... Unless we can encourage dialogue in the political arena, our hope for social change are flimsy" (Hargrove, 1998, 168). For social union leaders dialogue "supported by well-informed membership" and preparedness to bargain for gains is "the first line of defence for labour" (Hargrove, 1998: 169). The second line of defence is influencing governments. They refuse to recognize that the Keynesian compromise is over and has been for years.

The primary political activities have included lobbying, rallies and demonstrations geared towards "making a point" and gaining "legislative advances." More often they have foregone any advances and been satisfied with trying to avoid serious setbacks in legislation. Social unions have still not learned the lesson, made clearly by activist organizations, that it is impossible to shame neo-liberal governments because, when it comes to attacking working class communities, they have no shame.

The Days of Action, one-day, city by city mass strikes to protest the Tories, showed the preference for political protest, mostly legal and orderly, geared towards gaining media attention and "keeping the Harris government honest and accountable" (Hargrove, 1998, 180), which it never was. There was no emphasis on fighting with an eye towards making it impossible for the government to implement its agenda. In describing the Toronto Day of Action Hargrove proclaims: "We all had one thing in common: we wanted to get a message to the Harris government. That day we did" (1998, 197). So strong was the "message" that the Tories continued unabated for another seven years as working class communities were devastated. Harris made it very clear that symbolic protests had no impact on him when he famously stated, in response to the Days of Action: "I

don't do demonstrations."

The social unions expected consultation from the capitalist attack dogs in the Tory government and were disappointed when none was forthcoming. The social unions maintained this sense of disbelief throughout eight years of Tory rule. The CAW even signed a joint letter with over 60 corporate heads simply asking for consultation with the Premier before any legislative changes were implemented. They long hoped and believed that the dialogue would happen, completely misreading and misunderstanding the intentions and character of neoliberal governments, as they had misread the social democrats.

Such social unionist illusions help to render the control of governments by corporations a surprise. Social unions, like other business unions, defer to legal "protection" in contracts and political assistance from parties for social issues. They are so respectful of legal "protections" and parliamentary solutions that they are loathe to take any action that might lower their standing before the state.

Nowhere is there a sense that the one-third of the work force that is currently unionized in Canada is, along with their allies, not only a force to pressure the government, but a force that, if mobilized for militant action, could win its own demands while making it impossible for the bosses and government to implement their "tragic" policies.

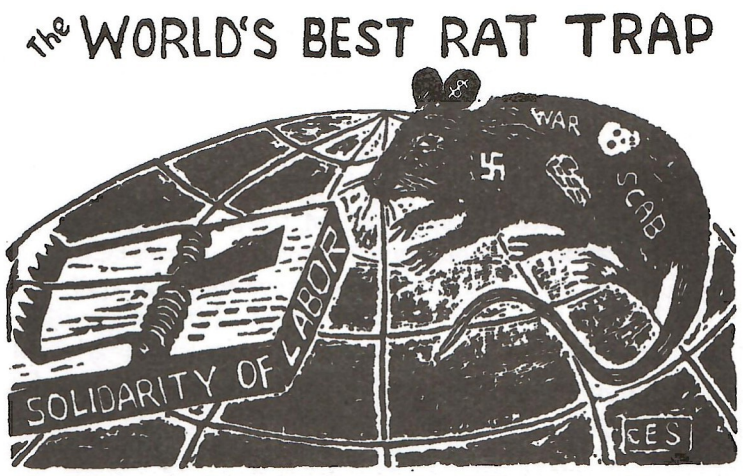
Of course this implies also that workers, self-organized, might improve their lot through their own activities rather than expecting such improvements from the government and their "progressive" social movement leadership. This gets at the heart of social unions' limitations. Like leaders of other business unions, social union leaders are concerned to constrain and direct the efforts of union members in a way that maintains the authority of the leadership. As rank-and-file workers we have to recognize that our real power lies elsewhere than parliamentary appeals made on our behalf by leadership, no matter how progressive it might be.

Bargaining for Social Change

Rank-and-file mobilization is impeded within social unions by their commitment, like other business unions, to a hierarchical, leadership-driven structure which privileges a grievance and bargaining approach to issues, both in the workplace and socially. The bargaining approach breeds a conciliatory and compromising approach to political economic issues ("But to pretend that your way is the only way, particularly at the bargaining table, is sheer stubbornness" [Hargrove, 1998, 23]).

A former CAW economist suggests that the strength of the CAW is located in the structures for collective discussions and development of responses. He then goes on to identify those structures as "the strong locals and the locally rooted executive board, the extended education and training for activists, and a tightly knit staff" (Gindin, 1995, 252). Thus social union leaders still views unions primarily as the leadership and staff of the organization, as "the duly elected bargaining agent" (Hargrove, 1998, 27). Members are still viewed as people the union (as something other than the workers) must build solidarity with (Hargrove, 1998, 55).

The union's central office plays a principal role in collective bargaining reinforcing "the president's direct involvement in major negotiating rounds" (Gindin, 1995, 265). With the growth



of the union through amalgamation "this heavy dependence on the president" was not sustainable. The solution to this was, of course, that "others in top leadership positions would have to develop the confidence and authority to take over more of those duties" (Gindin, 1995, 266).

Social unions still view their primary task as bargaining, which keeps the emphasis on leadership. Bargaining, within most social unions, remains a hierarchical and exclusionary process involving leadership (national staff, local presidents, bargaining committees). When that fails, there can still be personal meetings between the local president and the boss. Hargrove (1998, 118) has even described communication with the boss as the "most effective weapon in our arsenal."

Like other business unions, social unions rely heavily on paid staff, appointed to do bargaining, grievance arbitration, and even community liaison work. The bargaining committee does the work and leaders work things out over dinner with the bosses and politicians over dinner at exclusive restaurants (see Hargrove, 1998, 24 if you think I'm exaggerating). Members are left simply to "ratify the terms and conditions of any collective agreement we negotiate on their behalf" (Hargrove, 1998, 31).

Gindin (1998, 271) suggests that "the union must balance the internal democratic process with effectiveness in democratizing corporate power in the workplace and in society." This means that even social unions must "be sufficiently centralized to balance the centralized power of the other side, yet decentralized enough to permit local initiative and mobilization" (Gindin, 1995, 276). Bureaucratization is only a risk if centralization reaches an "overwhelming level."

Social struggles are viewed as a subordinate adjunct to bargaining, which again, primarily applies pressure in support of negotiations carried out principally by leadership. Bargaining for social justice issues is a limited approach which undermines the real power that workers have which is the power to run production and organize distribution and social services without bosses or governments. Leaving that aside, however, it is crucial to point out that social unions, like any other business union, hamstring even the power of workers to withdraw services by prohibiting strikes during the duration of a collective agreement, by denying solidarity strikes. Strikes remain confined to bargaining issues rather than being elements of community or social defence. Prohibitions against wildcat strikes are included within contracts, thereby giving away one of the greatest tools that workers have. Hargrove (1998, 109) suc-

cinctly puts the fears leadership holds for wildcats when he states: "As energizing as a wildcat strike might be for workers, it is the kiss of death at the bargaining table."

The CAW does a good job of getting members into education courses at the Port Elgin Centre or through university labour studies programs. More CAW members take these courses than for all other unions combined. This is to be commended and indeed more such opportunities should be available for workers.

Social unions, with their tough rhetoric and conciliatory reality, have played into this apathy by feeding the sense of powerlessness and insecurity, by avoiding direct confrontations with the bosses and by disciplining workers and poor people who stand up and fight.

Even social union education work, however, has been geared towards preparing a new generation of leadership. "The ultimate purpose of the PEL is to build leadership skills" (Hargrove, 1998, 130). The program is designed to "contribute the background for using and developing "bargaining and contract administration skills" (Gindin, 1995, 188). Students are chosen to attend the courses by a committee that includes representatives from the local and the education department.

Community activities, as well as workplace efforts, are still staff or leadership driven. "Social activism, ... whether collecting for the United Way or fund-raising for a community beautification project," is "all union staff work" (Hargrove, 127).

When CAW staff went on strike against the union, however, leadership used its claims to being a social movement against the strikers. Claiming the CAW was a "political organization" leadership tried to guilt staff about shutting down a "social movement" and preventing it from fighting for members, their families and communities. This is the same guilt tactic used by manipulative NGOs like Greenpeace Canada when their workers have been on picket lines.

Of course what the leadership giveth, the leadership can also taketh away. Thanks to efforts of rank-and file members CUPE established a legal defence fund to support members arrested during political actions. Unfortunately once members started getting nailed at demonstrations leadership cancelled the fund for being too costly.

The real measure of social unionism rests in its response to rank-and-file movements and initiatives. In this regard the record has been sketchy at best.

During demonstration against the Free Trade Area of the Americas in Quebec City in 2001, CAW and CUPE members literally had to fight union marshals to get to the fence to join direct actions. The leadership had arranged a rally in a field away from the sites of demonstrations and police attacks. Afterward rank-and-file members demanded direct action training.

More recently flying squads have been recruited to act as marshals at rallies and demonstrations, a clear violation of their purpose. Flying squads were developed to provide opportunities for organized collective action that was autonomous from union bureaucracies and not constrained by considerations of legality. The flying squads, which were initiated within the CAW but have grown in other unions including CUPE, were begun as primarily rank-and-file bodies to do strike solidarity work and to support the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty direct action casework (actions at welfare and immigration offices). Over a few years the flying squads had spread throughout the province as victories grew and as word spread in and across workplaces. Workers chafing under conservative leadership in their locals turned to flying squads as a way to meet their needs directly and as a way for progressive and militant workers to overcome isolation in home locals and build alliances with other militants, inside and outside of their unions. So it's not surprising that sooner or later the National would turn on them. While flying squads were mobilizing to take part in the Ontario Common Front campaign of economic disruption in 2001, the CAW national executive ordered that any future flying squad actions must be approved by the National or by the local President. The National effectively reined in the flying squads and played a major part in demobilizing the OCF campaigns in crucial cities like Windsor (Canada's major link in the NAFTA "superhighway" and a main auto center).

At this point it seems that the CAW bureaucracy's clampdown on the flying squads is complete. At a panel discussion on creative tactics that I took part in at this year's Labor Notes conference, Michelle Dubiel, a CAW "Ontario Chapter" flying squad representative, stated with great satisfaction that marshals had finally been instituted in the CAW flying squads. Dubiel noted that there had been much discussion and some resistance to this but happily concluded that members were eventually brought to see the necessity of marshals.

Hierarchical and undemocratic practices are deeply connected with demobilization of membership. Social unions, with their tough rhetoric and conciliatory reality, have played into this apathy by feeding the sense of powerlessness and insecurity, by avoiding direct confrontations with the bosses and by disciplining workers and poor people who stand up and fight. They do it also by reining in or, indeed, shutting down democratic and autonomous rank-and-file tendencies in the locals. They undermine equality by maintaining leader and led structures. All of this has played into the demobilization and demoralization that deepened after the Days of Action were revealed to be a bluff.

Business Unionism Plus Charity

Rather than solidarity for self-determination and autonomy, social unionism pursues a paternal charity approach to community involvement. Instead of viewing community allies, fellow workers or neighbors, social union leadership suggests that "we have to recognize that there are people in our society who are different and who must be treated in a way that helps make their lives easier." This approach underlies social union "thinking about how we in the CAW must deal with people with disabilities, with workers of color, with Aboriginal people, with gays and lesbians, with women" (Hargrove, 1998, 47-48).

Social unionists describe their efforts as agitating for social change as well as wages and benefits. For the most part, however, the view that unions owe a big debt to communities translates into successful United Way campaigns. "The CAW has always backed up its demands that governments and corporations do more for the less fortunate by asking our members to support charitable organizations. In many communities, our union sets national records for United Way contributions" (Hargrove, 1998: 128). In this way workers' resources are taken out of their hands and turned over to an organization, one that is not opposed in any way to capitalist relations of exploitation, that

beyond deciding where to put the money is noted for a bloated bureaucracy that eats up much of the funds on its own administration.

Too often, whether assisting community groups or activist organizations, contributions are viewed in terms of donations. When I was organizing a student strike against neoliberal cuts to education in Canada a number of organizers participated in Windsor and District Labour Council meetings in an effort to see a mobilization of unionized workers. The response from Labour Council was that the one thing unions could really contribute would be money for photocopying.

This money is not given freely however. In response to negative reactions to Hargrove's actions during a Day of Action demonstration Hargrove proclaimed: "So what if one or two of our coalition partners complain afterwards. My response would be: 'The next time you spend thousands of dollars and a lot of your members' time, as the CAW did, to get 200,000 people at a street rally, then maybe I'll be quiet" (1998, 198).

A stark example of how this can play out against the interests of working class movements and communities is revealed in the CAW treatment of OCAP. OCAP has been at the forefront of resistance to the neo-liberal form of capitalism in Canada. OCAP members, including rank-and-file unionists, Mohawk Warriors, unemployed workers, homeless people, teachers and students, have long put forward a coordinated effort to fight governments and bosses with an eye towards winning substantial material victories for poor people against governments, of all stripes, and bosses. The range of actions which they undertake are not symbolic acts designed to make a point (or shame a government which has no shame). OCAP actions, including economic and political disruption, are acts of working class unity and autonomy aimed at making it impossible for the government and its corporate backers to carry through their agenda.

On June 12, 2001, 50 or so Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) members, Wobblies, students and rank-and-file workers of the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) and United Farm and Commercial Workers flying squads held a "mock eviction" at the constituency office of Tory Provincial Finance Minister Jim Flaherty. Flaherty was a central figure in pushing the hard edge of the Conservatives neo-liberal agenda. As Labour Minister it was Flaherty who brought in legislation making it more difficult to organize service workers and easier for employers to interfere with organizing drives. During his time as Attorney General he drafted the brutal law making it illegal to panhandle or squeegee in Ontario.

While the left in Canada has been almost universal in its condemnation of police attacks on OCAP, there was one unexpectedly loud voice of sympathy for Flaherty and his henchmen after the eviction: CAW National President Basil "Buzz" Hargrove. Hargrove, who never misses a chance to play up the union's progressiveness on social issues, was quoted in the right-wing, and OCAP-hating, *Toronto Sun* as saying: " I do not support the Harris government (Tories) and I don't support any of the legislation they have passed since they were elected. But I sure support their right to do that. They were elected by the people. I don't have to agree with them, but I sure respect our democratic system, unlike a whole lot of people in political life today who don't respect it" (June 14, 2001, 15).



Hargrove went on to say that the CAW, at the time OCAP's major funder, would consider pulling its financial support. Apparently not satisfied that his political masters' were sufficiently pleased, Hargrove agreed to meet personally with current Labour Minister Chris Stockwell to assure him that the CAW would indeed pull its funding as Stockwell had publicly requested. This while OCAP members, including organizer John Clarke, were still languishing in jail having been denied bail. Chris Stockwell, by the way, was the person who drafted the legislation that changed the legal workweek in Ontario from 44 to 60 hours and allows companies to opt out of the Employment Standards Act (overtime, health and safety, minimum wage) if they can prove that it impedes their "global competitiveness." Sitting down with Stockwell to discuss CAW matters and OCAP is nothing short of a betrayal of not only CAW members but all of the working class. So much for the solidarity of this type of social unionism.

The other major plank of CAW social unionism is its Social Justice Fund, a registered charity that "donated about $1 million a year to worthy causes" (Hargrove, 1998, 132).

Some of the important projects supported include removal of land mines (for which the CAW was the only Canadian organization to donate money), refugee assistance in Rwanda and money for education in post-apartheid South Africa. Sup-

port for co-op and nonprofit housing and improved community services, clean-ups, youth activities, shelters and food banks. Thus what I present above is in no way intended as a dismissal of these and other significant and often important contributions made by the CAW and CUPE. Indeed more unions should follow this lead and make similar contributions.

Rather the point is that something beyond social unionism must mean more than financial donations. It must certainly mean more than third party charitable donations to organizations such as the United Way. Instead it must include rank-and-file autonomy and freedom to mobilize militant support for community struggles, even, or especially, where these struggles go beyond what the leadership is prepared to engage in.



It must also mean a commitment to real fights against bosses and governments in terms that are deemed necessary by the people engaged in those struggles in order to win what they need, not simply to register dissent, protest or raise awareness.

Neither conservative nor social unions are organizing a serious, material challenge to the government and their corporate bosses.

Conclusion

Social union leaders tend to defer struggle to some time in the future. They speak of a time when growing anger and frustration would lead increasing numbers to form coalitions and demonstrate in support of economic and social justice even as those movements are forming before their very eyes.

Over the last few years there has been some tension within the Ontario Federation of Labour which is roughly played out between social unions and more conservative unions.

In reality the debate is not that large and shows the generally limited nature of labour politics right now. Conservative unions seek only bargaining and electoralism while avoiding activist politics of any but the most symbolic sort. Social unions also focus on legal and symbolic routes geared toward media recognition and public condemnation of the government of the day. Neither conservative nor social unions are organizing a serious, material challenge to the government and their corporate bosses. Hagrove is right about one thing: "one of the reasons the CAW [and other social unions] seems outspoken, standing alone on many public policy issues, is that many parts of the movement, such as the Ontario Federation of Labour, no longer play a meaningful role" (1998, 200).

In the face of neoliberal capitalism and the withdrawal of the welfare state the social union leadership are left dumbfounded. They hold to the view that under the welfare state workers actually controlled the political agenda. Hargrove asks: "How did working people yield the only democratic power available to them (the right to cast their ballots) and expect that life for their families would, as a consequence, get better, not worse?" (1998, 206).

This question contains two major assumptions underlying social unionism. First, that the only "democratic power" available to workers is the ballot and second, that the vote can actually be counted on to improve people's lives. When the NDP showed the second assumption to be painfully false, the first assumption posed a roadblock to organizing any effective action to gain what workers need (as opposed to what they can get from governments).

Social unionism may be all that can be expected of top-down, leadership-managed social unionism. The criticism levelled by one social unionist at the NDP can equally be applied to social unionism in Canada: "Relative to the enormous task at hand... the politics being offered is meek and narrow" (Gindin, 1995, 270). Something more will have to come from rank-and-file movements and truly alternative organizations.

These initiatives are already present. They are exemplified in the efforts of CAW members to break through union marshals to get to the front lines in Quebec City. Some of these same members confronted the leadership at Port Elgin to forcefully demand direct action training to better prepare themselves for future actions. They are exemplified also by the courageous CAW members who fought, in the face of direct threats, to develop the flying squads on a rank-and-file basis. They are also present in the CUPE 3903 flying squad and rank-and-file committees that put workers' bodies on the line to fight alongside community allies to wage real battles against governments and the bosses.

Anarchists and syndicalists must put our efforts into supporting members in these efforts. Within our own unions we must work to develop genuine rank-and-file movements rather than wasting time trying to replace union leadership or reform union structures.

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From the Italian Anarchist Federation report to the International Federation of Anarchists Congress in Besancon :

An awareness cuts across all movements of opposition, and those not specifically anarchist as well – namely, that only outside the state's forms of organization it is possible to think and practise a path towards social emancipation. ...

Today's anti-globalization movements voice a disquiet, hard to be drawn back into institutional reach, but unfortunately at the same time inside them a kind of re-institutionalization is materializing, through mechanisms of a mostly informal leadership, that precisely due to its informality becomes ever more powerful, beyond dispute and unquestionable. However, so far the no-global caravan circus from Porto Alegre to Mumbay have been unable to reabsorb the richness and variety of a movement largely escaping from lining-up to the new-democratic tunes played by institutional areas.

As FAIt, we are working to the realization of an international anarchist gathering, "Globalizing Freedom," possibly for late summer 2005 in Carrara (Toscany). ...