Discussion paper

DP/132/2002

Labour and
Society
Programme

Reviving the American labour movement: Institutions and mobilization

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ISBN 92-9014-647-8

First published 2002

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Acknowledgements

This Discussion Paper "Reviving the American labour movement: Institutions and mobilization" by Richard Hurd, Ruth Milkman and Lowell Turner, forms part of a special series of studies on the labour movement in industrialized countries. The other studies in the series are: "Union revitalization in the United Kingdom" by Ed Heery, John Kelly and Jeremy Waddington, and "Unions in Germany: Groping to regain the initiative" by Martin Behrens, Michael Fichter and Carola Frege. These studies were presented at an international seminar entitled "The Labour Movement: Opportunities and Strategies" held in Geneva on 19-21 April 2001. The seminar, organized by the International Institute for Labour Studies in collaboration with the ILO Bureau for Workers' Activities and Cornell University's Comparative Labour Revitalization Project Team marked the completion of an Institute project: "Organized Labour in the 21st Century" under the Labour and Society Programme. The seminar served as a forum to synthesize the findings from various studies on the labour movement prepared in both developed and developing countries by the Institute, the Workers' Activities Bureau and the Cornell Team, and to draw policy lessons for the movement in a global economy. The Institute wants to place on record its appreciation of the authors of the three studies for having authorized their publication as Discussion Papers.

The authors thank Nathan Lillie, Richard Belfield, Ian Greer, Sarah Swider and Karen Pocious for valuable research assistance; the Ford Foundation and Cornell University for generous research funding; and ILO and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung for conference funding and support.

1. Introduction

The reawakening of the American labour movement under new leadership with new strategic orientations is a remarkable chapter in late twentieth century American economic and political history. Given up for dead by so many at home and abroad, under relentless attack from American employers, with government supports disappearing, the AFL-CIO and a core of key member unions have re-emerged since the mid-1990s as prominent workplace, community and political actors. With both top-down strategic reorientation and new local mobilization, these unions have fought to reverse decline and re-energize the movement. While the new efforts have not yet yielded enduring membership or national legislative gains, American unions have repositioned themselves and are arguably on the cusp of political breakthroughs in 2002 and 2004, and an organizing renaissance in the coming years.

While domestic in substance, this is an important international story. The long decline of the American labour movement neutralized a central locus of opposition to the rise, since the early 1980s, of market fundamentalism, deregulation, unfettered free trade and a package of economic policies known as neo-liberalism in a US-led global economy. With opposition in the United States weak and divided, as in the United Kingdom under Thatcher, policies of fiscal and monetary austerity together with market liberalism came to prominence across an increasingly globalized world economy. Even the strongest unions, in northern Europe for example, have come under growing pressure. Prospects for the revival of the American labour movement are thus a matter of great significance, and not only in the United States. Based on extensive research in progress, our goal in this paper is to present an up-to-date assessment of American union strategic development and implementation since the mid-1990s, to highlight what is happening and why, to discuss strengths and weaknesses, progress and shortcomings, and above all to move towards an explanation of what works and what fails.

2. The argument

To the extent that a revitalization of the American labour movement is underway today – and we believe this is the case – our research indicates that it is driven primarily by two forces. From above, there is new leadership in some unions and at the AFL-CIO, ready to offer resources and institutional support for local efforts to organize, build coalitions and expand the scope of grassroots politics. From below, there is renewed interest in rank-and-file activism and participation.

Based on our research findings to date, we take issue with those who argue that strong unions are largely a top-down phenomenon, dependent primarily on centralized authority and institutions. In the field of comparative political economy, for example, much of the overlapping corporatist and institutional literature makes this argument, in one variation or another (Soskice, 2000; Wallerstein and Golden, 2000). On the other hand, we also take issue with those who argue that union revitalization is primarily dependent on rank-and-file mobilization. This perspective is found in radical sociology, in the social movement literature, and among contemporary direct action proponents (Brecher and Costello, 1994; Kelly, 1998).

Both these perspectives are to a significant extent accurate, but not in their mutual exclusion, in their rejection of the other. In fact, we find that the key forces driving successful revitalization are neither top-down nor bottom-up, but both. Local union reform efforts, including organizing the unorganized, innovative collective bargaining campaigns, coalition building and grassroots political action, depend for their development and sustainability on ***both*** strong support from the national union ***and*** new rank-and-file leadership and mobilization (see also Voss and Sherman, 2000).

We call these two forces **institutional support** and **network mobilization**, and we find indications of their overriding importance in all six of the union strategies on which our research is focused: ***organizing, political action, coalition building, labour-management partnership,***

mergers and internal restructuring, and ***international solidarity.*** In the rest of this paper, after a brief literature re-consideration, we present research findings in each of these six areas, and conclude with some general considerations and future research concerns.

We have carried out or analysed numerous case studies for each of our six union strategies. Everywhere we have found conventional ways juxtaposed to more innovative approaches, and we have found widespread tension between top-down and bottom-up approaches. With great regularity, however, we have found that both top-down support and bottom-up participation are necessary for sustained success in the contemporary revitalization of the American labour movement.

3. Reassessing the literature

Post-war industrial relations literature in the United States worked within a dominant American-centred, pluralist perspective, assuming a stable social system and well functioning sub-systems such as industrial relations, with a focus on institutions and the details and effects of policies such as collective bargaining (Kerr, Dunlop, Harbison and Myers, 1960; Slichter, Livermore and Nash, 1960). This perspective reflected post-war growth and stability in the 1950s and early 1960s, as well as the cold war dominance of the American mass production economy. Consistent with apparently stable business unionism, this literature was challenged from a comparative perspective in the 1970s and 1980s by a new European-based literature on corporatism (Schmitter and Lehmbruch, 1978; Goldthorpe, 1984). While the new literature broadened the scope of analysis, moving labour and business out of the sub-system and into a more central position in the political economy (at least in some countries), the focus remained on institutions and policies. Each of these contending perspectives, pluralism and corporatism, served as precursors for the new institutionalism of the 1980s and 1990s (Hall, 1986; March and Olsen, 1989; Steinmo, Thelen and Longstreth, 1992).

While the literature on corporatism challenged American pluralist thought from a comparative perspective (e.g. labour plays a very different role in different societies), the next wave of American literature accepted some pluralist assumptions but challenged conventional industrial relations views based on sub-system stability (Kochan, Katz and McKersie, 1986). In a context of economic crisis in the 1970s and 1980s, new perspectives emphasized the strategic choice of employers, who in many cases opposed unions and undermined traditional collective bargaining arrangements in their response to increasingly competitive world markets (Piore and Sabel, 1984). Dynamic markets and employer opposition resulted in serious and accelerating union decline in the United States, destabilizing and in some cases marginalizing the traditional industrial relations sub-system while offering little hope for unions beyond concession bargaining, the abandonment of work rules, and the acceptance of new employer-led flexibility and labour-management cooperation.

While the literature of the 1990s was dominated by strategic choice on the one hand and institutionalism on the other, a new mobilization perspective emerged hand-in-hand with the revitalization of labour movements, especially in the United States and United Kingdom (Johnston, 1994; Fraser and Freeman, 1997; Bronfenbrenner et al., 1998; Hurd, 1998; Heery, 1998; Kelly, 1998; Milkman and Wong, 2001; Turner, Katz and Hurd, 2001). In contrast to earlier literature, new revitalization research emphasized the key role of union strategies, of unions and workers as actors with choices that matter. Early post-war theorists (industrial relations scholars, political scientists, sociologists) had seen unions as integrated, stable parties to enduring bargaining arrangements, with rank-and-file participation largely unnecessary (except in local elections and every few years in the event of a strike). Kochan, Katz and McKersie reflected the break-up of post-war stability and viewed unions to a large extent as victims of global markets, employer opposition and state policy. While unions did have choices, none were very promising, with options limited by employer attitudes and competitive markets: cooperation and participation seemed the best route

but offered little hope for turning around the protracted decline of the American labour movement (cf. Kochan, 1995).

The new institutionalism, by contrast, emphasized unions, employers and government as actors integrated into a more or less stable framework of laws, organizations and regularized relationships. With behaviour shaped by institutional and political constraints, however, labour was largely marginalized in the United States and the United Kingdom in the 1980s and early 1990s, with little hope of any fundamental change. In all of these earlier perspectives, whether unions were nicely integrated or unfortunate victims, there was little room for labour as a movement, for expanded rank-and-file activism, for activist leadership committed to reform, for an expansion of democracy in the workplace and beyond. The latest wave of labour scholarship, by contrast, examines the potential for unions to serve as proactive organizers, system-builders, grappling with and shaping the challenges they face, to a large extent through the mobilization of participation (Bronfenbrenner et al., 1998; Turner, Katz and Hurd, 2001).

We have learned a great deal from the earlier literature, especially from strategic choice and institutionalism. We build on concepts such as actor choice, strategic alternatives, transformation, and the powerful shaping influence of existing institutions. But we also believe earlier perspectives are flawed. None of their conceptual frameworks predicted the AFL-CIO's turn towards organizing and local mobilization. Both post-war industrial relations and new institutional perspectives favour system stability, taking institutions and bargaining arrangements as given. Strategic choice with its focus on transformation is more dynamic, reflecting changing world markets and power relations; yet the emphasis is still on shoring up collective bargaining and shifting towards labour-management cooperation. Our work, by contrast, seeks to integrate institutions, global markets, politics and social movements into a comprehensive actor-based framework. We are especially interested in describing and explaining contemporary labour activism, its presence or absence, successes and failures. If there is no enduring resurgence of the labour movement, if the lights go out on the expansion of workplace and political democracy, then perhaps the earlier perspectives were right. If our view has merit, however, then rising social forces such as labour will need all the research and analytical support they can get in the development and implementation of new strategies for growth and influence in the years ahead.

A prime place to start in examining institutional support and network mobilization in today's American labour movement is in the central focus of revitalization and reform: the expanded commitment to organizing the unorganized.

4. Organizing

The linchpin of contemporary union revitalization efforts in the United States is new organizing. The steep decline in union membership over the past few decades, which by the year 2000 had brought union density to a post-World War II low of 13.5 per cent (and only 9.0 per cent in the private sector) must be reversed if unions are to have any hope of regaining the influence they had in the mid-twentieth century. The new AFL-CIO leadership headed by John Sweeney, elected to the Federation's presidency in 1995 on a "New Voice" platform, is keenly aware of this problem and has offered an array of material and moral incentives to its affiliates to increase their attention to external organizing (Sweeney, 1996). Some very promising approaches have emerged in the past decade or so, and the number of new workers organized has increased significantly: from less than 100,000 workers a year before 1995 to about 350,000 in the year 2000. Yet, the number of existing union members lost due to business closings/relocations, retirements, and layoffs was even greater: there was a net loss of about 200,000 union members in the year 2000. Thus despite a sharp increase in new organizing, reversing the overall decline in union density – which, given ongoing workforce growth, requires recruiting at least half a million new workers each year – remains

elusive. Perhaps most alarming, the absolute number of union members in the United States today is less than it was in 1992 (Greenhouse, 2001a; 2001b).

One reason why the overall picture looks so bleak is that the increased organizing efforts which have occurred thus far have been concentrated in relatively few unions. In the year 2000, 80 per cent of all new workers organized were recruited by ten of the AFL-CIO's 66 affiliated "international" unions, and 50 per cent by only three unions! The Service Employees International Union (SEIU), formerly headed by AFL-CIO President Sweeney, has been the national leader here, claiming 70,000 new recruits in the year 2000. Two other unions (the United Food and Commercial Workers and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers) reported organizing 50,000 workers that year, with the next highest at only 22,000 (the Teamsters and the United Auto Workers). As the AFL-CIO's organizing director noted recently, "We have a very uneven situation in terms of unions that are committing serious resources to organizing" (Greenhouse, 2001b). If other large unions could duplicate the results of the SEIU, which spends about $100 million a year (nearly half its annual budget) on organizing, the goal of adding a million members a year to union ranks might be within reach. And even among unions whose overall recruitment levels are more modest, some very promising new organizing approaches have been developed that have the potential to lead to quantitatively significant results in the future.

Simply spending more money and devoting more personnel to organizing makes a big difference. But this is not the only distinctive feature of the SEIU's recent success; it has also been extremely innovative in its organizing strategies. Rather than waiting for workers interested in unionization to approach it for assistance, the SEIU has taken a proactive approach, identifying key sectors, industries, occupations, and local labour markets where organizing efforts can capture significant ground (numerically as well as in terms of leverage for the future). This strategic planning process is complemented by extensive background research on the industries and sectors that are chosen as organizing targets, something unions traditionally have engaged in only rarely. By analysing the power structure of the target industry and identifying the key players and critical points of vulnerability, the SEIU has been able to effectively counter the enormous advantages employers enjoy in the current political and legal environment. Money, strategic planning and research are thus ways in which **national union support** is critical to organizing success.

Along with careful strategic planning backed up by extensive research, the SEIU has learned how to mobilize workers on the ground, often using dramatic tactics designed to maximize media coverage, often drawing on the energies of existing members through a process of "internal organizing." These efforts, which have a grassroots, rank-and-file oriented dynamic, are carefully orchestrated with the goal of capturing the hearts and minds of the wider community, often enabling the union to overcome the many other disadvantages unions face in organizing efforts (Lopez, 2000). By seizing the moral high ground in its struggles, through a combination of rank-and-file mobilization and sophisticated public relations work, the SEIU has often managed to tip the balance of public sympathy – and power – in labour's favour. But the new organizing model is hardly an embodiment of the vision of those who believe "bottom up" rank-and-file organizing is the key to success (a view that typically attributes blame for the sorry state of unionism overall to the foibles of union bureaucrats). On the contrary, a crucial ingredient in the SEIU's success has been strong leadership from the top, and a willingness to displace local union officials who are reluctant to embrace the organizing programme, frequently resorting to coercive means such as placing locals in trusteeship. It is the combination of support from national union leadership, on the one side, and local rank-and-file mobilization, on the other, that most often yields organizing success.

Another hallmark of the new organizing efforts pioneered by SEIU and some other innovative unions as well is a rejection of the traditional road to union organizing embodied in the election representation process administered by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). Both because of the widespread view in labour circles that the NLRB process has been corrupted to the point that it gives more tools to anti-union employers than to unions, and because of the complex employment relationships in industries like building services, where the nominal employer (among whose

employees an NLRB election otherwise would be held) is a subcontractor who would be driven out of business if the firm were unionized, the SEIU has developed a variety of alternative means of gaining union recognition. Faster and more effective than the electoral process, alternatives include tactics such as broad community coalitions (including churches, human rights groups and elected local politicians) to target and pressure employers to recognize the union.

If the SEIU is at the leading edge of innovation, it is not entirely alone. The Hotel and Restaurant Employees (HERE) is an example of a union that has been extremely creative and effective in certain contexts (Las Vegas being the most notable example), and has pioneered the use of employer neutrality agreements and "card checks" as an alternative to the cumbersome NLRB process, yet its overall organizing record is relatively modest in numerical terms. As Kate Bronfenbrenner documented some years ago, rank-and-file-intensive organizing strategies are far more successful than more traditional methods, yet making the transition within local unions to a focus on new external organizing has proved quite difficult (Bronfenbrenner, 1997). Local union officials accustomed to devoting their energies to servicing their existing membership – which is less risky and brings more immediate rewards than the daunting challenge of new organizing in the face of fierce managerial opposition and highly uncertain results – have proven quite resistant to change. As Voss and Sherman have shown, local unions typically make the shift toward SEIU-style innovative organizing (even within the SEIU itself) only when three key conditions are met: they are faced with a serious internal political crisis on the local level; they have staff members with experience in other social movements who have a broader vision of social change and a willingness to use strategies and tactics different from those traditionally employed by unions (such as coalition building and rank-and-file mobilization); and when there is strong support from the national union with which they are affiliated (Voss and Sherman, 2000).

Precisely because of the difficulties in transforming local and in some cases national unions dominated by more traditional leadership, the AFL-CIO under Sweeney's leadership has tried to provide incentives to its affiliates to innovate and to focus more on organizing. The Federation has launched important initiatives such as "Union Cities," a drive which seeks to revitalize central labour councils, organizations which in many cases had stagnated into insignificance, to foster new organizing and to rebuild labour's political power at the local level (Moberg, 2000; Kriesky, 2001). Another important AFL-CIO initiative is the Organizing Institute, which trains young people to become union organizers and arranges to place them in local unions around the country to assist in new organizing initiatives (Foerster, 2001). Both these programmes have enjoyed some success. Yet the highly decentralized structure of the AFL-CIO, a loose federation whose leadership exerts only limited influence over the activities of its affiliates, has proved a serious obstacle to these efforts. There is no tool equivalent to the trusteeship mechanism by means of which a national union can exert control over one of its local affiliates by replacing the entire leadership. Considering the difficulties of fostering organizational change inside the labour movement, together with the longstanding external problems of fierce managerial opposition to unionism, enhanced in many sectors by the very real option of relocating jobs offshore in response to union organizing efforts, the task of successfully reversing the decline in union density remains a formidable one. The success of SEIU and others in recent years, however, shows that change is possible.

5. Political action

National unions have for the most part accepted the coordinating role of the AFL-CIO in the political arena throughout the history of the merged Federation. Thus it is not surprising that efforts by the Sweeney administration to centralize control of political strategy have been generally supported. The most notable change has been a dramatic increase in funding for the AFL-CIO political operation. In 1996 in response to the anti-labour tilt of the Republican-controlled and

Gingrich-led Congress, affiliated unions agreed to a special assessment (above normal dues) totaling $35 million to finance expanded electoral activities. The funding was renewed in comparable amounts for the 1998 and 2000 election cycles (Dreyfuss, 2000).

In 1996 the special political fund was earmarked for grassroots mobilization and member education in 85 targeted congressional districts, although in the end most of the effort was concentrated in 45 districts with vulnerable Republican representatives. These swing districts received most of the attention in an effort to help the Democratic party recapture control of the House of Representatives. Although the objective was to create "sustainable grassroots union organizations," in reality well over half the expenditure went to oriented television advertising in about 30 of the districts, contrasting the positions of the candidates on legislation important to working people. The balance of the funds supported voter registration, phone banks, literature distribution and get-out-the-vote efforts.

Although the ultimate objective of recapturing control of the House was not achieved, the Republican majority was reduced and President Clinton was re-elected. Labour played a key role in defeating the incumbent in 18 of the 45 districts, or a 40 per cent win rate -- impressive given that 95 per cent of incumbents nationwide were re-elected that year. Equally important, exit polls revealed a substantial increase in voter participation among union households, particularly in targeted districts. Overall union households accounted for 23 per cent of the voters, compared to 19 per cent in 1992. In House elections, these union voters supported Democrats 68 per cent to 32 per cent, compared to an 8 per cent Republican advantage in households without a union member (Molyneux, 1996).

With the bulk of the money going into advertising, it is not surprising that the grassroots political structures set up for the election essentially dissolved and had to be rebuilt in 1998. With a larger share of funds devoted to the field effort in 1998, the ability to reach members directly improved, although problems with coordination between the national and field operations persisted. Leading up to the fall elections, a referendum ballot in California prodded labour to a massive grassroots initiative that succeeded with the defeat of Proposition 226, which under the guise of "paycheck protection" would have greatly reduced unions' ability to engage in political activity. In spite of a seemingly insurmountable lead in early polls, the ballot initiative was soundly defeated. In Congressional elections, union voters once again supported Democrats, this time at a rate of 70 per cent. Union households accounted for 22 per cent of the electorate, down from 1996 but not directly comparable because that was a presidential election year. Among union members, 46 per cent voted in this off year election compared to 36 per cent of the total voting age population (Rubin, 1998).

Based on voting patterns, then, the union political effort continued to be effective. If results are the measure of success, however, the record is not so positive. The major accomplishments of the labour movement's heightened political involvement have been defensive: defeat of "paycheck protection," defeat of "fast track" trade legislation, and forestalling Republican attacks on unions such as the Team Act. The major positive accomplishments have been on legislation only indirectly beneficial to unions, such as increases in the minimum wage. Nonetheless, the effort to build a lasting political presence continued in 2000 with an expanded grassroots operation tied to a stronger institutional presence in the presidential election process.

In an effort to boost political influence, the 1999 AFL-CIO convention took the unusual step of endorsing Al Gore for President prior to the primary season. If Gore had been able to capture the White House, labour would have been positioned to push more aggressively for a labour-friendly political agenda. This type of top-down political influence is a far cry from the rhetoric of building labour's political strength at the grassroots. However, the grassroots effort was not eschewed but extended, perhaps in part to help with the primary effort. In 2000 there were 71 targeted districts with extensive grassroots campaigns. The AFL-CIO placed 1000 political coordinators in these and other key districts, compared to 400 in 1998 and 200 in 1996 (Bernstein, 2000). True the grassroots effort still relied on traditional methods: "AFL-CIO members handed out 14 million leaflets at work

sites, mailed out 12 million pieces of campaign literature, and made 8 million phone calls"(Hoffman, 2000). But this extensive reach could not have been accomplished without extensive networks of volunteers recruited by unions to participate in the campaign.

In spite of Gore's defeat and the failure of the Democratic party to gain control of Congress, the accomplishments from labour's heightened political presence are notable. The share of voters coming from union households increased again to 26 per cent. Labour is widely credited with providing Gore's popular vote victory and his ability to carry key swing states such as Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota in last-minute surges attributed to heavy union turnout. The reduced, very thin Republican margin in the House as well as the tie in the Senate would likely have not occurred without labour's leadership in the field (Hoffman 2000).

Perhaps the most encouraging factor for labour from a long-range perspective, is that in those states where the grassroots campaign was most extensive the results were extraordinary. The best example is Colorado. After a close loss by the union-endorsed candidate in the 1998 governor's race, the state federation and three Central Labor Councils (with support from the national AFL-CIO) developed a volunteer network and designed a grassroots campaign for 2000. Ten senate districts with the highest union membership density were selected with the objective of shifting the balance of power in the state senate. A voter registration drive signed up 7200 new union voters; affiliated local unions agreed to pay release time for 44 full-time and 74 part-time staff, while member volunteers served as district coordinators; and 1300 volunteers were recruited and trained to staff phone banks and visit the homes of union members. The end result was remarkable. Although Bush carried Republican Colorado solidly by eight points, labour's campaign succeeded in seven of the ten targeted senate districts as the Democrats gained control of that body for the first time in 40 years (Birnbaum, 2001).

In spite of successes like Colorado and the nationwide improvement in union member participation in the election, labour faces a very difficult set of challenges in the political arena for at least the next two years. With the presidency of George W. Bush and continued Republican control of Congress, labour was hit in early 2001 with an unprecedented onslaught of anti-union policies. The President has issued four damaging executive orders. One requires posting of the Beck decision in all unionized workplaces, informing workers of their right to have union dues reduced if they file as a "conscientious objector" (i.e. formally protest their status as a union member). The second weakens the Service Contract Act requiring federal government contractors to pay the prevailing wage in their area. The third ends project labour agreements on federally funded construction projects, in effect reducing the opportunity for unionized construction companies to bid successfully for those contracts. The fourth ends restrictions on federal purchase and service contracts with private firms that violate federal labour and environmental laws.

In addition to the executive orders, President Bush has made three anti-union administrative decisions: to open the United States to Mexican trucks over the objection of the Teamsters Union; to halt a strike by Northwest Airlines mechanics at the request of the company; and to end unilaterally the federal labour-management partnership. In the legislative arena he supported the repeal by Congress of ergonomic regulations designed to protect workers from repetitive stress injuries and introduced a federal version of "paycheck protection" to reduce union political activity (this is the only initiative in this direction that has not been adopted). Finally, he appointed Elaine Chao as Secretary of Labor. Although the president was forced to withdraw his initial selection (Linda Chavez), Ms. Chao is no friend of labour. Married to Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, one of the most conservative Republicans in the Senate, she came to the administration from the Heritage Foundation, a right-wing Washington think tank with an openly hostile labour agenda.

The attention the new President has devoted to anti-union initiatives is unprecedented. Even Ronald Reagan did not take the offensive until afforded the opportunity by the ill- fated air traffic controllers' strike in 1981. Clearly he is not philosophically in tune with the union agenda, but the intensity and rapidity of the attack early in his administration goes well beyond differences in policy perspective. Perhaps he is vindictive towards labour because of the effectiveness of the

political campaign orchestrated by unions on behalf of Al Gore. Had it not been for labour's efforts it is almost certain there would be no cloud hanging over the Bush presidency in the aftermath of the Florida ballot counting adventure and Bush's defeat in the national popular vote. Furthermore, it is quite likely the Republican party would have a much stronger hold on Congress, allowing the Bush agenda to sail through the legislative process. At any rate, for at least the next two years and possibly longer, organized labour will be on the defensive. Adding to the challenge, there are proposals under consideration in 30 states for new "paycheck protection" restrictions or "right to work" laws outlawing union shop agreements (America@Work, 2001).

The current situation notwithstanding, there is no doubt that labour has improved its overall effectiveness in the electoral arena. The political programme has increased member participation and directly affected election outcomes. Unfortunately electoral progress has not yet translated into significant victories of the sort needed to enhance the right to organize or otherwise extend the reach of unions in the United States. The promise for the future lies in the demonstrated ability to mobilize the grassroots in support of labour's political agenda. The need to combine top-down support with member activism is clearly evident in the experience of unions in the political realm. The increase in resources and staff expertise at national level has played a significant role, but would have accomplished little on its own. The crucial ingredient that has fueled success is the political field operation and its demonstrated ability to recruit and deploy members as political volunteers in a remarkable and extensive grassroots operation.

6. Coalitions

The building of newly active coalitions – most of them at the local level, organized around a wide variety of issues – has been a central component of the revitalization of the American labour movement.[1] The Seattle Coalition, which brought together 30,000 demonstrators organized by labour groups with 20,000 from environmental and other groups to protest against World Trade Organization policies in late 1999, was only the most dramatic manifestation of the growing coalition phenomenon (Hawken, 2000). Since the 1980s, and accelerating since the mid-1990s, key unions have moved beyond traditional bases, in some cases to build enduring alliances with human rights, environmental, religious, student, feminist, and other community groups.

Such efforts have been more or less successful, as indicated by the 26 coalition case studies which we have completed so far. From both the case studies and the limited literature on the subject, two variables stand out for the rise and lasting influence of labour-backed coalitions: ***support from one or more national unions,*** and the spread and **mobilization of activist networks** at the local level. Activist networks are typically led by "bridge builders" with interests, contacts and background that extend beyond the labour movement (Brecher and Costello, 1990; Rose, 2000). Framing campaigns around broad issues along with "institutionalization" – progress beyond ad hoc one-issue alliances to a deepening of ties, sometimes around a variety of issues – also appear critical for success and staying power.

While most national unions (led by the AFL-CIO) sat out the social movements of the 1960s, local unions here and there, in cities such as San Francisco, Seattle and New York, did participate in anti-war and civil rights coalitions (Turner, 2000). As those movements declined in the 1970s, labour's limited participation (which for the most part did not include environmental or feminist groups) also declined. In response to deep recession and plant closings in the 1980s, however, new labour-community coalitions emerged in campaigns to save factories and jobs (Brecher and Costello, 1990). On that foundation, a new wave of labour-backed coalition efforts expanded

[1] Much of the research for this section on coalitions was conducted by Sarah Swider, while she was a graduate student at Cornell University.

through the 1990s across a range of issues: from living wage to anti-sweatshop to union organizing drives to grassroots politics to fair trade and the battle in Seattle.

With research in progress, we can only suggest the causal factors at work. It does appear that coalitions have increased in importance for some key unions, especially for those with a commitment to growing organizing effort (including SEIU, HERE, USW, UNITE, CWA). Labour-backed coalitions cover a wide variety of local issues, in addition to national alliances with environmental (and other) groups around issues such as fair trade. Such coalitions can be grouped as ***ad hoc*** and ***institutional,*** with the latter more likely to promote union goals successfully. Ad hoc alliances can disappear after a campaign, or they can develop towards institutionalization, with many coalitions currently somewhere in between (loosely linked but ongoing).

Justice for Janitors provides an example of a labour-initiated, enduring coalition now institutionalized in many places – with strong national union support and widespread activist mobilization, including both union members and supporters from local churches, political and community organizations. In successive campaigns over the past decade, JfJ in Los Angeles, for example (as in several other cities), led by SEIU, has successfully mobilized thousands of janitors as well as community and political supporters in organizing and collective bargaining breakthrough campaigns (Erickson et al., 2001; Milkman and Wong, 2001).

Journalist Robert Kuttner has described the ***living wage movement*** as "the most interesting (and under-reported) grassroots enterprise to emerge since the civil rights movement" (quoted in Pollin and Luce, 1998, p.1). In cities large and small across the country, coalitions of activists, often labour-led, campaign for an area minimum wage considerably higher than the national minimum wage, with notable cases of success. Examples include the Community Labor Alliance in Connecticut (with living wage laws passed in New Haven in 1997 and Hartford in 1999), the Santa Clara County Central Labor Council in alliance with Working Partnerships USA and 60 groups (pushing the San Jose City Council to adopt the very strongest of living wage policies in 1998; Brownstein, 2000), and the Los Angeles Living Wage Coalition (with broad popular and deep political support resulting in victory in early 2000). In all cases, successful coalitions were led by local unions with active national union support, with networks of overlapping activists in long-term regularized relationships among a variety of community-based groups, churches and organizations.

The ***anti-sweatshop movement*** of the late 1990s and beyond offers another example of successful coalition building, in this case for campus-based local movements originally inspired (but no longer led) by organized labour (Greenhouse, 1999; Griffith, 1999). UNITE has been the key union involved from the start. Chapters of Students Against Sweatshops (180 of them later brought together in the umbrella United Students Against Sweatshops; see usasweb.org) took hold on American campuses after the first Union Summer in 1996. A project of the new Sweeney-led AFL-CIO, Union Summer placed hundreds of college students in summer internships in organizing and collective bargaining campaigns, encouraging them to build centres of labour activism on their return to campus. SAS chapters were the most important early campus product of Union Summer, which in its first five years has trained over 2,000 college students and inspired many to build the SAS movement. Although the details of demands, actions and successes are beyond the scope of this paper, the movement has by all accounts grown rapidly, with successful sit-ins at universities as diverse as Duke, Brown, Michigan, Wisconsin, Penn, Arizona, Georgetown and North Carolina. While UNITE and Union Summer helped to launch the movement and UNITE has underwritten the costs of USAS national meetings, our case study interviews indicate that campus-based coalitions are significantly autonomous. Supporting each other when possible, working together loosely in USAS, activists have built distinct local coalitions with a variety of campus, religious and community groups and local unions. Critical components of success in the growth and development of the campus anti-sweatshop movement include: national union support (especially at the beginning, for resources and education); the building of lasting local organizations (SAS and related coalitions); and the capacity to mobilize thousands of students for demonstrations, sit-ins and other activities.

In some ways the most problematic yet at the same time most promising coalitions are ***sustainability alliances,*** with labour and environmental groups at the core (Moberg, 1999; Rose, 2000). When these two groups – often adversaries in the past – work together, the potential for both national political influence and local mobilization is great. Today there are scores of such coalitions working together on a wide variety of issues, from living wage and anti-sweatshop campaigns to toxic waste sites, workplace health and safety, clean air and global warming. While local coalitions predominate and are generally quite autonomous, they typically receive important support from national labour and environmental organizations as well as from a national umbrella grouping called the Alliance for Sustainable Jobs and the Environment. The Alliance formed in the losing fight against NAFTA in 1993, regrouped to defeat fast-track legislation in 1997 (Shoch, 2001), and provided the framework within which the Seattle demonstrations were organized in the fall of 1999 (Hawken, 2000). Active members at the national level range from Steelworkers and Carpenters to Friends of the Earth and the Sierra Club. While recent tensions over global warming policies have made collaboration more problematic, over 200 member groups remain committed to fighting anti-labour and anti-environmental legislation at national and local levels, including support for local coalition efforts in dozens of cities and regions. Observing that labour-environmental coalitions are often "cross-class alliances," Fred Rose emphasizes the role of bridge builders – those who have been upwardly or downwardly mobile or have social movement histories that push them across the divide (Rose, 2000). Critical for the success of labour-environmental coalitions are the support of national organizations, overlapping networks of activists led by bridge builders, and an ongoing history of common effort leading to processes of alliance institutionalization.

Increasingly indispensable for organizing, political action and international solidarity, coalition building is critical to the current revitalization of the American labour movement. As indicated in living wage, anti-sweatshop and sustainability campaigns, some unions are opening up, much more than in the recent past, both to specific common political, community and workplace campaigns and to ongoing coalition building with a wide variety of other groups. Moving beyond the "special interest group" mentality of business union traditions, coalition-building unions are broadening their community bases while expanding their political influence. Problems in building alliances with other interest groups such as environmentalists are considerable, which is why support from national unions (advice, resources, contacts) is so important. Equally important in making coalitions vibrant and enduring at local level are the mobilization efforts of bridge-building activists, from inside the labour movement and beyond. And finally, the development of ongoing relationships and common experience (regularized in processes of "institution building") is essential to deepen trust among actors and organizations, laying the groundwork for expanded future collaboration around common interests.

7. Labour-management partnership

One finding from our case study research is that there seem to be two broad types of labour-management partnership.[2] These are not mutually exclusive, they sometimes overlap, and some do not fit well into either category; nonetheless, there is a clear pattern of two predominant types. The first is a model from the 1980s, still prevalent today, driven by the intensification of market competition (global, national, local), firm competitiveness problems and union decline. Key characteristics include commitment to a new spirit of labour-management cooperation, labour-management committees of various kinds on various themes, concession bargaining, some mutual

[2] Much of the research, especially the case studies, for this section on labour-management partnership was conducted by Richard Belfield and Karen Pocious, both Cornell graduate students, and funded by a grant from the Centre for Advanced Human Resource Studies at Cornell's School of Industrial and Labour Relations.

problem solving and cost cutting, with cooperation committees and efforts running parallel to deeper, more established adversarial relations. The second is a more recent model, expanding over the past few years, based both on intensified competition and union revitalization efforts. Key characteristics here include strong employers and strong unions, with partnership sometimes developing in the aftermath of a strike or organizing drive, including a core tradeoff in which the union agrees to support the company in various ways in return for company acceptance of the union (or unions). Levi-Strauss and Kaiser Permanente are examples of partnership agreements in which unions promote the company, provide input into management decision making, and negotiate peak as well as plant-level settlements, while the company to some extent incorporates the union and agrees not to oppose unionization efforts in non-union parts of the company. Boeing and Verizon are recent cases in which passionate, well-organized strikes (both in 2000) were followed by extensive partnership agreements – at least on paper.

While the first model (labour-management cooperation) has produced positive examples (at Ford, G.M., Xerox, Bethelem Steel, Alcoa, Corning) and has stabilized troubled plants and firms, cooperation often remains superficial, with active employee participation limited and real partnership extended only to a core of company and union officials (Kochan, Katz and McKersie, 1986). The second model may be less superficial but more problematic, with potential for renewed conflict (although this can also be a problem in the first model) – while nonetheless offering more substantial potential gains in participation, consensus and representation for companies, unions and employees.

Where both types have succeeded, there is typically national union support – advice, personnel, other resources and political cover, which is important. While both models call for expanded rank-and-file mobilization, the first often translates into regularized cooperative relationships among key managers and union officials or appointees, with little workforce participation beyond those levels. The second model, however, requires the mobilization of union activists in organizing campaigns at non-union workplaces. The first model often stagnates in the absence of meaningful participation, while the second model fails (from a union viewpoint) without mobilization for rank-and-file organizing. The development of trust through ongoing relationships ("institutionalization") is difficult yet essential to the success of either model.

While cooperation agreements have all too often proved disappointing to participants, firm-level agreements that call for management neutrality in organizing can, if the company is not failing or downsizing, play a role in expanding union membership. But we have not yet found hard data to support the idea that labour-management partnerships at some firms can influence other firms to be less hostile to union organizing efforts. So far – based on our collection of 30 partnership case studies – it does not appear that the spread of labour-management partnerships of either variety has contributed substantially to revitalizing the labour movement in the United States. Specific partnership agreements can and have yielded positive effects, for particular firms, unions and workers (Osterman, 1994; Gittleman, Horrigan and Joyce, 1998). As an overall strategy for union revitalization, however, such agreements are seen by many of today's activists as belonging to the failed strategies of the 1980s – along with concession bargaining, expanded services (such as credit cards and other group plans), associate memberships, and a focus on Congress in the absence of strong grassroots support. Advocates of organizing activism rose to prominence in the 1990s precisely because that broad package of efforts showed no signs of reversing union decline (Bronfenbrenner et al., 1998).

Relations of labour-management partnership, however, may play a role in union organizing strategy and in the long-term vision that unions develop for the workplace and society of the future (see Herzenberg, 2000). Management neutrality at firms such as Verizon (CWA, IBEW), Levi-Strauss (UNITE) and DaimlerChrysler (UAW) may underpin future organizing success. And the SEIU, to cite another example, now has a "high road" strategy for organizing hospitals and other workplaces, a strategy that emphasizes the positive and attempts to lay the groundwork for future labour-management partnerships. For professional, technical and other white-collar employees,

such an approach may work better than the traditional adversarial model. Since the SEIU has also been a strong advocate for social movement unionism, this raises the intriguing question of the extent to which rank-and-file mobilization, if pointed in the right direction and if successful, can lay the groundwork for expanded relations of partnership.

Not long after his election as president of the AFL-CIO, John Sweeney spoke to a large gathering of business leaders, proposing a "social compact" based on constructive relations between labour and management in the interests of both (Greenhouse, 1996). Union organizing and representation strategies become more compelling to the extent that unions can push for worker/citizen input into questions of workplace and social organization. It is obviously easier for labour to have proactive input into the workplace of the future if relations with management are at least cordial, and there is no question that most people would rather work in a cooperative than an adversarial environment. For these reasons, labour-management partnership could well be an important component of labour's strategic vision.

American and British partnership agreements at specific firms and plants can be compared to broader relations of social partnership in continental Europe. While relations of partnership at specific firms are also characteristic of social partnership, the latter is a broader society-wide concept, built in the best cases (Germany, Scandinavia) on negotiations between strongly organized unions and employers (Thelen, 1991; Turner, 1998). To the extent that labour uses its leverage and position in national or industry-wide negotiations to achieve concrete gains (for its members and for society as a whole), social partnership may be an important part of a labour revitalization strategy. By contrast, American partnerships are thus far a smaller matter in the overall picture of union revitalization.

The British TUC's embrace of both social partnership and organizing raises again the question of the compatibility of social movement and partnership approaches (Heery, 1998). TUC leadership believes that both are essential to the revitalization of the British labour movement. Without organizing success, British unions lack the strength to engage in meaningful, equal relations of social partnership with employers; without partnership as a goal (and perhaps a comprehensive framework of social partnership institutions), organizing success may result in the same old adversarial voluntarism that was so vulnerable to Thatcher's attacks. In a similar vein, union membership decline in Germany may indicate a need for revitalization at the base, for rank-and-file mobilization (targeting, for example, young workers and women) to shore up the institutions and relations of social partnership (Turner, 1998).

It may well be, therefore, that future enhanced relations of labour-management partnership are not at all incompatible with today's sometimes militant organizing efforts. Ironically, the success of each may ultimately rest upon the success of the other. Recent and ongoing cases such as Verizon (CWA, IBEW), Kaiser Permanente (SEIU and several other unions) and Boeing (IFPTE) – all with extensive partnership agreements but all troubled in implementation – offer tests of the extent to which labour-management partnership, rank-and-file mobilization, and future organizing or bargaining success are compatible. In addition to obviously important company strategies, our evidence indicates a greater likelihood of success where national unions are supportive, rank-and-file participation is extensive, and labour-management partnership is regularized and deepened over time.

8. Mergers and internal restructuring

The labour movement's quest for revitalization has spawned restructuring initiatives at the federation and national union levels. Subsequent to the election of John Sweeney as president in 1995 the AFL-CIO has completed internal reorganization of staff departments and made substantial progress in redesigning field operations. Efforts to redefine the Federation's relationship with

affiliates have been partly successful, although resistance from national unions has limited progress on this front. Some national unions have engineered their own internal restructuring, largely aimed at elevating the importance of organizing. In addition, several unions have pursued mergers in efforts to consolidate power.

The AFL-CIO's staff reorganization was completed in 1996 and included creating several new departments, merging a number of units, and expanding certain activities (AFL-CIO, 1997). The most important new departments are Organizing (which includes the Organizing Institute), Corporate Affairs, and Public Affairs. The Organizing Department has been charged with establishing organizing as a priority and assisting affiliates with strategy and staffing concerns. The Corporate Affairs Department has concentrated on capital strategies, workplace democracy and strategic research. The Department of Public Affairs has contributed an extensive, greatly improved communications and public relations effort. Other new units include the Working Women's Department, with a modest budget but an important symbolic role, and the Department of Public Policy, which provides research and develops policy ideas for the Federation's legislative programme.

Other than the new departments, the most important change in the AFL-CIO's internal structure has been expansion and reorganization of the field operation. The old Department of Organization and Field Services was renamed the Field Mobilization Department. The number of regional offices was reduced to four, but the field staff increased with a national AFL-CIO state director operating in almost every state. Members of the field staff are now expected to promote activism, a near total reversal of the former role of passive observers. The most important vehicle for building activism is the ongoing campaign to breathe life into Central Labor Councils (CLCs). CLCs formerly functioned largely as clubs for local union officials. With Field Mobilization's Union Cities programme, CLCs are now encouraged to engage union members in "Street Heat" events which promote grassroots organizing and political activism, and facilitate mutual support among affiliated local unions (Eimer, 1999; Kriesky, 2001). This effort is being extended through a new campaign to restructure at the local level by merging small CLCs in an innovative New Alliance reorganization process under the combined sponsorship of Field Mobilization and the state federation. The goal of New Alliance is to create a system of central bodies that are large enough to command resources sufficient to employ full-time staff who will work with local activists (AFL-CIO, 2001).

Taken as a whole, the AFL-CIO's internal reorganization is best viewed as part of an effort to redefine its relationship with affiliated national unions. One key objective is to strengthen the role of the centre. After five and a half years some modest steps have been taken in this direction. Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of the initiative is the work of Field Mobilization, that in effect reaches directly into local unions through a network of newly energized CLCs. Also successful has been the increased prominence of the AFL-CIO's political operations described earlier, built upon a longstanding consensus that the Federation should coordinate electoral and legislative efforts. By contrast, there has been little change in the bargaining arena where the Corporate Affairs Department's efforts to influence national union strategy have not yet taken root. Progress on organizing is mixed and deserves special attention because it is so important to the future health of the labour movement.

With outspoken support for organizing from President Sweeney and other officers, the Organizing Department has had an impact in establishing organizing as a priority throughout the movement. However efforts to extend the Federation's influence regarding organizing strategy and tactics have been largely rebuffed by affiliates determined to pursue their own agenda. A case in point is the subject of organizing jurisdiction. Starting early in the Sweeney era, this issue has been discussed within the Organizing Department and among the national union presidents serving on the AFL-CIO's strategic planning committee (originally Committee 2000). As recently as 1999 a proposal was considered to offer explicit jurisdictional preference to unions engaged in industry-wide and joint organizing efforts (Mortimer, 1999). Consensus, however, was not achieved because

of the conflicting philosophies and priorities of national unions. Some pursue industrial unionism, others promote occupational unionism, and most are unwilling to forego promising opportunities even if the potential unit does not fit neatly into the union's self-described jurisdiction.

Ultimately the AFL-CIO has chosen to back off, revising its organizing objectives to fit the reality. The change in tone in the 1998 and 2001 AFL-CIO programme summaries reflects this acceptance of a more accommodating role. The 1998 programme spoke of "leading" the change to organize and "sponsoring strategic organizing campaigns" (AFL-CIO, 1998). By contrast, the 2001 programme emphasizes "helping affiliate unions" and "providing strategic research and other assistance" (AFL-CIO, 2001). President Sweeney and his staff are as committed to organizing as ever but no longer presume that they are in a position to set the organizing agenda. As with bargaining, national unions have retained authority.

Internal restructuring has been modest in most national unions. Increased attention to organizing and political action has been accompanied by notable resource reallocation that has forced some degree of reorganization and reassignment of staff in many unions. The impact of this reallocation has been most keenly felt in unions that have suffered absolute losses of membership and dues revenue. Nonetheless, this type of structural modification has typically been accepted as necessary and has primarily affected national headquarters operations. Some unions have taken this process further, pushing change throughout the organization down to the local union level. The most notable cases are the United Brotherhood of Carpenters (UBC) and the Service Employees (SEIU).

The SEIU now allocates 50 per cent of its national budget to organizing and expects locals to follow suit wherever possible (Stern 2001). To move the process along at local level the national is engineering mergers of locals it deems too small to pursue an effective organizing agenda independently. Although this effort has been questioned in some quarters within the union, broad support among elected leaders for the organizing priority has helped move the process, as have a few carefully orchestrated trusteeships in large locals with substantial resources (such as New York City and Boston). Removal of old line, heavy-handed local leaders has been applauded in the media and the broader labour movement, and has simultaneously allowed SEIU President Andy Stern to appoint as trustees progressive unionists committed to organizing. Top-down structural change has been matched by an aggressive grassroots organizing approach as described above, and has allowed the SEIU to continue its steady growth while other unions have struggled.

The UBC's top-down restructuring has been less successful and has stirred more controversy internally and externally. Shortly after assuming the presidency of UBC in 1995, Doug McCarron cut national office staff by half, eliminated departments, outsourced some work, and rented out a substantial part of the national headquarters to generate revenues. These changes helped fund a shift of 50 per cent of the union's resources into organizing (Winston, 1996). Subsequently, McCarron reorganized the union's regional and local structure, eliminating many locals and shifting control of resources to regional councils dominated by McCarron's political allies. These changes have allowed the UBC to expand its organizing programme dramatically, but it is unclear whether there has been any payoff in the form of increased membership. On 29 March 2001, UBC seceded from the AFL-CIO, ostensibly because the Sweeney administration has compromised its commitment to organizing and has been less effective than McCarron in mandating a shift in resources. It is widely assumed elsewhere in the labour movement that the move was actually made to give UBC more leverage in raiding other building trades unions (Orrfelt, 2000). Although the steps taken by UBC (especially withdrawal from the AFL-CIO) are extreme, they are consistent with the sometimes brutal and always troubling tendency of many unions in the United States to approach organizing from a narrow perspective tied to institutional preservation.

There has been a steady consolidation of national unions over the past few decades through merger. Since John Sweeney became president the number of unions affiliated with the AFL-CIO has dropped from 75 to 64, and with the exception of the UBC defection the decline in numbers is the result of mergers. Many of the mergers have involved a smaller union going through difficult times being absorbed by a larger union with deep pockets. Examples include the December 1996

merger of the 40,000-member Aluminum, Brick and Glass Workers with the United Steelworkers, and the March 1997 merger of the 19,000-member International Woodworkers with the Machinists. Others have been pursued by larger unions looking to extend or consolidate their presence in an occupation or industry, such as the SEIU mergers with the Committee of Interns and Residents in 1997 and the National Health and Human Service Employees Union (1199) in 1998. Others are presented at least ostensibly as mergers of two organizations with individual identities that will be preserved in the structure of the new stronger unified force. The best example of the latter is the 1999 merger of the United Paperworkers with the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers to form PACE, the Paper, Atomic and Chemical Employees.

Although the AFL-CIO has encouraged consolidation as a way to strengthen unions and to combine resources in order to fund increased organizing, the most promising mergers in terms of size and potential impact have ultimately failed to materialize. In 1998 the proposed merger of the two larger teachers' unions, the American Federation of Teachers and the independent National Education Association, failed when NEA convention delegates rejected a proposal strongly supported by their national president. The merger failed in part because of resistance to affiliation with the AFL-CIO, but more directly because the cultures and governing processes of the two organizations were viewed as incompatible (Pizzigati, 1998). Similarly, the widely anticipated "Heavy Metal" merger among the three largest unions in manufacturing - the Steelworkers, Autoworkers and Machinists – ultimately failed for similar reasons, along with difficulty reaching agreement on how the new organization would be governed and staffed (Clark and Gray, 1999).

Mergers that are culminated are based on high hopes for increased power and success. For example, the agreement between the Electronic Workers and the Communications Workers in September 2000 explicitly forecast "enhanced ability to bargain secure jobs and economic prosperity, …better service [for] members, … and ability to organize the unorganized in our respective industries" (Daily Labour Report 2000). The reality of merger outcomes typically is not so rosy. Although mergers do improve the ability of troubled unions to weather hard times, such mergers are typically followed by long transition periods and limited integration. It is often not clear that the merged organization has any more economic and political power than the sum of the two previously separate unions (Chaison, 2001). And there is clear evidence that for many unions the merger route has detracted from overall growth by providing an easy way to grow without expending resources on organizing.

Our conclusions regarding the effectiveness of efforts to pursue mergers and other forms of structural change are consistent with our overall theme. Top-down approaches are of limited value by themselves because institutional preservation and power take priority over movement building. When combined with efforts to mobilize members the potential is greater and the results more rewarding. In this context it is not surprising that AFL-CIO efforts to restructure have been most successful in field operations where the Union Cities and New Alliance programmes are helping to revitalize labour at the grassroots by combining activism with structural reform. This is not to say that other changes at the AFL-CIO and within national unions are irrelevant or unimportant, but rather to re-emphasize our belief that structural reforms alone are insufficient to assure revitalization.

9. International solidarity

Dramatic and important changes in the labour movement in the United States in recent years, and in the relationship of unions to their counterparts in other countries, has prompted speculation about the rise of a new labour internationalism.[3] Our evidence so far shows that there has been a significant change in how unions think about international solidarity, even if the changes remain rather insubstantial compared to the radically altered organizational environment of global corporate and political governance now facing unions. Nonetheless, a little internationalism can go a long way, and significant cooperation based on transnational inter-organizational networks of autonomous unions now occurs regularly, much more so than in the past. Many American unions now have the capacity to combine sophisticated transnational strategic planning with rank-and-file mobilization.

Unions in the United States have responded, although belatedly, to the rapid globalization of employers with a variety of strategies of their own. As illustrated by the "Union Made" garment commercials of the 1970s and the anti-Japanese import UAW initiatives of the 1980s, many manufacturing unions sought at first simply to keep foreign products out through import restrictions and appeals to consumer patriotism. Openly protectionist attitudes, however, failed to stem the import tide and became less influential in labour thinking by the mid-1990s (Frank, 1999). In certain industries, unions still use regulatory definitions of skill and safety standards, along the same protectionist lines, to keep foreign competition out. The International Association of Machinists (IAM), for example, lobbies the Federal Aviation Administration for safety regulations that make it more difficult to certify foreign airplane mechanics to work on planes flying to the United States.

Because trade unions continue to be nationally based, most transnational union activities arise as inter-organizational cooperation through voluntary participation in transnational labour networks. Through these networks, unions give and receive material assistance, coordinate their political and bargaining agendas and resolve jurisdictional conflicts. They exchange information on employers, working conditions and industry regulations, and seek pressure points to be used in transnational corporate campaigns. The goals of participation in transnational labour networks include: giving and receiving direct support in collective bargaining and organizing; giving and receiving information; and coordinating national political agendas, in particular to influence transnational politics on the global stage.

There are two important types of tactic used by unions in the United States relating directly to transnational collective bargaining: corporate campaigns and secondary industrial action. Many unions have developed transnational capabilities for corporate campaigns in support of organizing drives and collective bargaining. In a corporate campaign, the union analyses the structure of the targeted corporation for weaknesses and pressure points, which can then be attacked by creative means in effective campaigns. Because corporate structures are increasingly transnational, corporate campaign strategy often leads to alliances with unions and political actors in other countries, in order to access crucial pressure points. Experts from the International Trade Secretariats (ITSs) serve as "international campaign consultants," assisting affiliate unions in making contacts, and launching their campaigns.

Unions in the United States follow the transnational corporate campaign model most vigorously in industries with transnational capital structures, and in which employers have aggressively sought to prevent or eliminate unionization. HERE (Hotel Employees' and Restaurant Employees' union), for example, targets international hotel chains with corporate campaigns in support of organizing

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[3] This "International Solidarity" section was originally drafted by Nathan Lillie, a Cornell University Ph.D. student, and is based to a large extent on his in-depth interviews with officials at international trade secretariats and national unions between 1998 and 2001.

drives. While individual hotels may be bound to particular locations and markets, these hotels, especially the large ones but many medium-sized ones as well, are increasingly owned by large multinational conglomerates. HERE's transnational activities arise as an extension of organizing strategy, in response to the transnational structure of capital.

American unions sometimes use traditional industrial action in support of unions in other countries, despite draconian legal restrictions on secondary boycotts. The International Association of Machinists, (IAM), for example, refused to service British Airways aircraft during a 1997 strike by BA flight attendants. The International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU), the North American longshore union for the west coast, has conducted two major secondary industrial actions in recent times, in 1997 in support of locked-out Liverpool dock workers, and again in 1998 in support of locked-out Australian dock workers. In each case, ILWU dockers, at significant legal risk to themselves, refused to unload cargo that had been handled by replacement workers.

Both IAM and ILWU actions had strong support from union leadership, although in the case of the ILWU boycott actions were actually organized by transnational rank-and-file networks. Both actions reflected broader global institutionalized cooperation in conjunction with the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF). The IAM action came at the request of the ITF, which had declared the BA strike a "strategic priority" and sought support in the form of industrial action from unions in many countries. In the Liverpool strike, the ITF had no official involvement, but Liverpool dock workers used ITF contacts to manage a global campaign, which ILWU workers supported with industrial action (Lavalette and Kennedy, 1996). International solidarity actions of the ILWU, an American and Canadian-based union, in the 1998 Australian docks dispute were part of a global strategy of industrial action sanctioned and facilitated by the ITF.

While transnational campaigns and industrial action are the most visible manifestations of labour transnational activity, they occur infrequently and rely on pre-existing networks. As Harvie Ramsey has pointed out, by the time there is a crisis and solidarity is needed, it is too late to begin building relationships (Ramsey, 1997). There appears to be a correlation between informational networks and solidarity actions. ILWU longshoremen, for example, through a variety of personal and institutional connections, discuss with foreign counterparts their experience with safety regulations, port regulation, and repertoire of industrial action. These same contacts come into play as a basis for organizing transnational labour actions. Contacts for transnational campaigns also develop at conferences and meetings, organized by ITSs and other international labour organizations. For example, in a 1999 transnational corporate campaign against Continental Tire, the United Steelworkers of America drew on contacts made at a rubber industry union conference the previous year.

Information exchange is important in its own right. Unions in the United States draw on the experience of unions in other countries to formulate positions in bargaining, in lobbying for legislation, and in planning strategy. The American Federation of Teachers, for example, collects data on schools and teacher working conditions in other countries in order to formulate independent analyses of educational initiatives, particularly when these draw on foreign examples. Another example is the recently established TUC Organising Academy in the United Kingdom, which draws on the example and inspiration of the AFL-CIO Organizing Institute and has communicated closely with American organizing activists in the building of new institutional support for enhanced British organizing efforts.

The third important international strategy now has a symbolic watershed: the Battle in Seattle. In a truly impressive and high profile campaign, American unions brought tens of thousands of demonstrators to Seattle for the WTO meetings held between 29 November and 3 December 1999. Remarkable was the wide range of participants active and present in this coalition effort, including environmental groups, consumer groups, religious organizations, and hundreds of trade unionists from other countries. Every indication is that a major new front has opened in struggles for democratic and human rights, one that includes international labour solidarity as a central feature (Smith, 2000; Levi and Olson, 2000). American unions have arrived in a new and impressive form

on this post-Cold War international stage, showing a strong capacity to mobilize members and to build broad, influential coalitions addressing the very nature of the new global economy.

In some cases, unions have proved effective actors on the transnational stage. It is also clear that as yet there is no global labour movement analogous to national movements. Instead, if the American experience is at all typical, labour transnationalism is based on national unions acting across borders on the basis of amorphous transnational networks. Once again, active national union support along with networks of activists are both critical. And as relationships develop through expanded networks and shared experience, including cross-national campaign collaboration, more becomes possible and likely.

10. Concluding remarks

Sources of union revitalization in the American case are varied. At this early stage of the research, we cannot make definitive claims; yet we do find a number of factors which are important across the six areas of strategic innovation. In particular, two threads pass through all of our viable cases, providing together a useful preliminary explanation for innovation and its relative success. The first is ***national union support*** for strategic innovations at the local level; the second is a readiness for ***rank-and-file mobilization*** led by activist local leadership. In addition, ***institutionalization,*** or the consolidation and deepening of ongoing relationships over time – in coalitions, politics, partnership, internal restructuring and international solidarity – is important in many cases for lasting reform efforts and strategic union success.

For comparative purposes, these are the key variables from the American research so far. We need to sharpen these hypotheses in our continuing case studies and other research, for all six union strategy areas. We need to know the relative importance of institutions and mobilization in other countries as well. If institutions and mobilization are both important, across countries as well as across cases, then we need to move beyond existing literatures that privilege one or the other. And we need to use the findings and new synthetic perspectives to suggest policy innovations that are neither top-down nor bottom-up but both, together reinforcing and driving strategic innovation.

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