

THE CCU

AND

THE CLC

Two

very different

Labour Centrals

The Canadian labour movement consists of over 600 different unions. Some of these unions are affiliated to one of Canada's four different labour centrals, while others (such as the Teamsters) are completely independent of any labour central. This article examines the two national labour centrals: the Canadian Labour Congress and the Confederation of Canadian Unions. We hope this article will explain the fundamental differences between the two organizations and provide a greater understanding of the trade union movement in Canada.

What is the Confederation of Canadian Unions?

Founded in 1969, the Confederation of Canadian Unions represents approximately 30,000 Canadian workers in thirteen different unions. There are provincial councils of the CCU in B.C. and Ontario.

What is the Canadian Labour Congress?

The CLC was formed in 1956 as a result of the merger of two labour centrals. It is made up of 74 U.S.-based unions and 24 national unions. The U.S. based unions represent over 60% of the 2.26 million CLC members. Nearly all of the Canadian affiliates are public sector unions. The CLC has labour federations in each province and labour councils in most major cities.

What are the policies of the CCU and the CLC on Canadian control of the labour movement?

The major principle of the CCU is that the Canadian labour movement must be democratically controlled by Canadian workers. Many of the unions in the CCU were formed after groups of workers, fed up with U.S. unions, voted to leave and form their own Canadian unions. The CCU believes that Canadian workers alone must decide how their union dues are spent, set union policies, and elect their own officers.

Since its inception, the CLC has been the voice of the AFL-CIO in Canada. Its feeble attempts to achieve "autonomy" for Canadian workers trapped in American unions have ended in failure after union bosses in the U.S. threatened to withhold CLC per capita fees. When the CLC has protested anti-Canadian trade policies favoured by American unions and the AFL-CIO, and protested the blatant interference of U.S. labour leaders in Canadian union affairs, its efforts have been treated with utter contempt by the U.S. labour bureaucracy. The major function that the CLC plays, is that it enforces the jurisdictional system set up by the AFL-CIO. This set-up guarantees the control of such Canadian sectors as manufacturing and construction by the American unions who dominate such jurisdictions.

What are the policies of the CCU and the CLC on rank-and-file control of the labour movement?

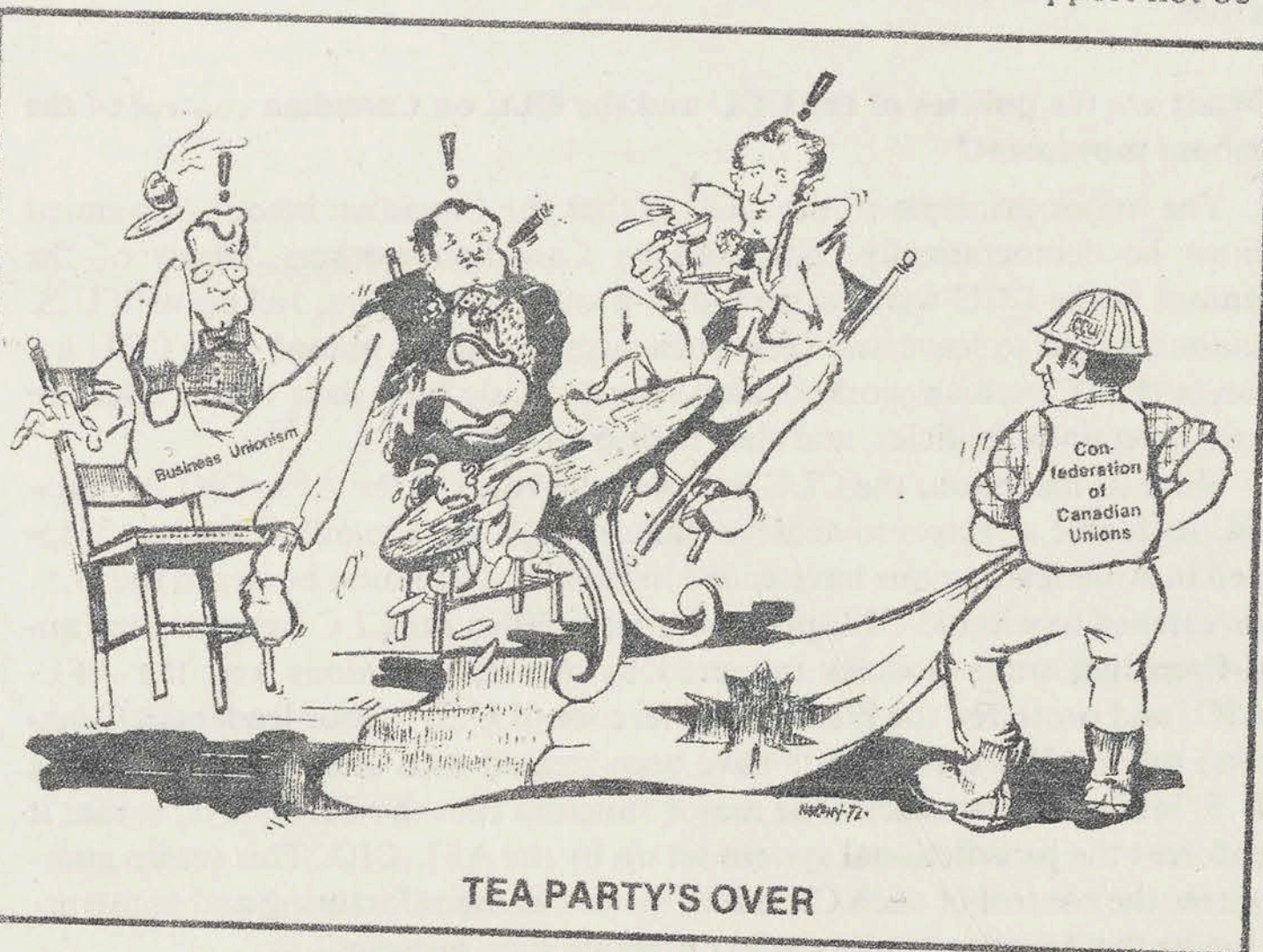
The CCU has a strong commitment to rank-and-file control in union decision-making. Most CCU affiliates have constitutional guarantees against the abuse of power by elected officers. These guarantees include the right to recall officers, democratic convention procedures (including election of all convention delegates), and the right of the rank-and-file to fully participate in the collective bargaining process.

Many affiliates within the CLC, particularly those based in the U.S., have constitutions which encourage domination by the union leadership over the rank-and-file workers who dare to question the internal policies of their union leadership. Leaders of these unions are given lavish salaries and expense accounts which encourage a callous attitude towards the rank-and-file union member who pays the shot.

What are the policies of the CCU and the CLC on strike support?

The CCU has always followed the principle that all strikers, regardless of union affiliation, are entitled to support. Such support includes the honouring of picket lines and may also include financial support where requested.

On many occasions the CLC and some of its affiliates have taken anti-union positions during strikes involving unions not affiliated to the CLC. During CAIMAW's strike at Griffin Steel in Winnipeg, for example, a CLC leader circulated a letter to all affiliates asking that financial support not be



given to the strike, and the head of the Manitoba Federation of Labour called the strike "a farce." Such actions have not deterred progressive unionists within the CLC from providing support regardless of union affiliation. There have also been many instances of CLC affiliated unions telling their members to cross picket lines set up by non-affiliated unions. (It should be noted that it is not unknown for CLC unions to cross their own picket lines.)

What are the policies of the CCU and the CLC on international unionism?

The CCU strongly believes in cooperation with workers in other countries. Our union has cooperated with workers in the U.S. in the past and we have also made contact with union representatives from several countries. We believe Canada will play a much more meaningful role within the international labour scene when we have a sovereign labour movement, and not one which is subservient to the U.S. labour movement and U.S. foreign policy.

The CLC supports international unionism only so much as it follows U.S. international policy. This has resulted in the CLC supporting labour movements in the Caribbean and Latin America that do not enjoy the support of many workers in these countries. Many of these union leaders were trained in the U.S. through programs funded by multinational corporations and the CIA. Many international activities of the AFL-CIO and the CLC have been geared more to fighting alleged Communist influences in the labour movement rather than genuine cooperation with workers to fight common employers.

What are the policies of the CCU and the CLC on political involvement?

The CCU does not support any particular party, leaving this decision up to the individual affiliates. CCU unions do not favour bestowing uncritical support for the NDP, although some affiliates and/or local unions do provide concrete support to some NDP candidates. The CCU believes that building a strong labour movement must always be the top priority. While the election of the NDP may help, it will not solve all the problems facing working people.

The CLC leadership, and the leadership of most CLC affiliates, favour uncritical support for the NDP. They have pumped vast amounts of their member's dues money into gimmicky campaigns to get workers to vote NDP. Many CLC affiliates are directly affiliated to the NDP and send blocs of delegates to NDP conventions.

In every case where the NDP has been elected provincially, it has shown that while they are a better alternative to business parties, they are clearly not prepared to return the uncritical support from the labour movement with uncritical support for working people. The Schreyer government's betrayal of the Griffin strikers in 1977 clearly pointed this out. Yet most

CLC leaders still pass off the NDP as though they are the salvation of Canada's working people.

Wouldn't we in the CCU have more clout if we were affiliated to the larger CLC?

To those unfamiliar with the Canadian labour movement, it would seem logical that there would be a direct connection between the size of a labour federation and the amount of power that could be directed on behalf of the membership against obstinate employers. But as many of our members who have had experience with large American unions know, size means little if there is no commitment to use it to the advantage of the rank-and-file member.

The CLC is not the kind of labour central that is interested in using its size to advance the cause of Canadian workers. Instead it is caught up in continual wrangling between various unions over who has what jurisdiction, and preoccupied with cozying up to Canadian government and business leaders. When CLC affiliates need help, they have to go through a bureaucratic maze and then are not guaranteed any support. The postal workers certainly did not benefit by being members of the CLC; their own central labour organization in fact assisted the employer in breaking their 1978 strike. Workers were on strike for over a year at the Adams Labs plant in B.C. waiting to see evidence of this greater clout that they supposedly enjoy by being affiliated to the CLC. There are countless dozens of other examples.

There are no easy solutions for working people in their battle to win improved wages and working conditions. The CLC has shown that the size of a labour central does not translate automatically into genuine power. The CCU may be a relatively small labour central but at least we are clear about the basic principles that have brought us together and we as Canadians are able to change these policies as we see fit. The CLC replaces union principles with public relations hype and attempts to convince unions to join it with a combination of threats and empty promises.

There are many good unionists within the affiliated unions of the CLC. Unfortunately good unionists are limited in the work they can do when they are trapped in a labour central or a union that is not oriented to the welfare of the rank-and-file member. We are sure these unionists share our hope that one day there will be one central labour movement in Canada and that this movement will be a coalition of rank-and-file controlled Canadian unions united on the basis of common goals and principles.

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BICE, WENDY
AUCE LOCAL I
UNION OFFICE

Confederation of Canadian Unions

1331 1/2A St. Clair Ave. W.
Toronto, Ontario. M6E 1C3
(416) 651-5627

