Explaining Varieties of Union Response to Globalization and Neoliberalism

Union Politics, Organizing, and Solidarity in Ontario and Newfoundland and Labrador

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Key Points

1. Union Decline and Response
2. Traditional Explanations for Variation
3. Cases: NL and ON variations
Union Decline and Response

- Union influence in most countries is declining
- This is due to:
  - ‘Neoliberalism and Globalization; the loss of members and financial and organization resources; erosion of social democracy and fraying of links between parties/unions
- But unions have attempted to develop new political resources through:
  - Alliances and organizing with other progressive groups
  - Protests, social/political advocacy campaigns
  - Targeted lobbying
  - Greater political autonomy; and strategic interventions
Traditional Explanations of Union Response and Effectiveness/Ineffectiveness

1. ‘Varieties of Unionism’ – Frege and Kelly – historical and institutional differences

2. Social unionism and the ‘organizing model’ vs business unionism (N. America) or corporatism vs radicalism (W. Europe)

3. Power resources – unions and Social Democratic parties; unions and parties of the right
Canadian Provincial Variation

**NL – ‘Pragmatic Unionism’ and Coordination**
- Unions politically ‘neutral’
- No or few political divisions between unions
- Strong informal community links
- No use of public advocacy campaigns. But some retention of strikes as provincial mobilizing tool.
- Initiate and oversee union-led apprenticeship programs
- Support and promote new poverty reduction programs

**ON – Union Decline and Fragmentation**
- Multiple political strategies among unions, and direct political involvement of some
- Extensive political divisions between unions and in provincial labour federation.
- Informal and intermittent ties to community and protest groups
- Some use of campaigns.
- Fragmented involvement in training and apprenticeship
- Protest and refusal of poverty reduction programs
Variation in Unionization – Private Sector

**NL - Steady**

**ON – Sharp Decline**
Variation in New Organizing – Private Sector

NL – Greater youth organizing; ON in decline

NL – High temporary organizing; ON little and declining
New Conceptual Framework
Varieties of Organizational Capacity

Organizational Capacity (Kathleen Thelen, Richard Hyman/McCormick)

1. Power resources matter – but these can be developed and used in a number of ways.

2. Politics
   - Political contributions; lobbying; protests and rallies; publicity campaigns; business/policy coalitions; direct institutional and bargaining links with gov’t.

3. Organizing
   - Traditional organizing and internal organizing must be supplemented with innovative community ties; or with new links to training and apprenticeship; and real gains made for precarious and immigrant workers.

4. Solidarity
   - Need for cooperation between major unions/major confederations/leading public and private sector unions. Labour federations need to ensure unity and take on new roles

Longterm fallout
- If unions fail to adapt to opportunity structures and fail to develop greater coordination, new memberships, and wider social vision, organizational capacities decline and entrench long-term problems ie ‘Post-Democracy’
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>Ontario – Politically Fragmented Solidarity ‘Low’</strong></th>
<th><strong>NL – ‘Neutral’ Solidarity ‘High’</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lobbying</strong></td>
<td>Moderate – leadership involved, some staff resources</td>
<td>Moderate – leadership; few dedicated staff resources; but coalitions/CAs with business for training support</td>
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<td><strong>Union/Party Finance</strong></td>
<td>Moderate to NDP; minimal to Liberals</td>
<td>Minimal – individual only to PC and NDP</td>
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<td><strong>Union/Party Links</strong></td>
<td>Formal and informal to NDP and Liberals</td>
<td>None- ‘Political Neutrality’</td>
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<td><strong>Political/Social Campaigns</strong></td>
<td>Limited in public and private sector unions. No province wide stoppages since 1997</td>
<td>None. But militant stoppages and protest directed at government.</td>
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<td>Case Comparison of Union Organizing and Mobilizing Strategies</td>
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<td><strong>Traditional Organizing</strong></td>
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<td>NL – Traditional Workplace Organizing &amp; Training Oriented</td>
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<td>New certifications and certfcn attempts – steady then rapid decline 2004</td>
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<td>Ontario – Sporadic Traditional and Fragmented Training Involvement</td>
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<td>Attempts and new certs - slow decline</td>
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<td><strong>Coalitions</strong></td>
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<td>None – but widespread informal links</td>
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<td>Intermittent use by public and private sector unions</td>
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<td><strong>Community organizing</strong></td>
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<td>Strike related mobilization and public sector campaigns</td>
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<td>UFCW and temporary migrant workers</td>
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<td><strong>Policy/Training Links</strong></td>
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<td>Extensive in apprenticeship. All employers opt in.</td>
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<td>New apprenticeship program. But voluntary employer partcn and widespread opposition</td>
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Conclusions & Implications

- Traditional explanations for variation in union decline and response need to be updated and extended, and new comparative frameworks developed.
- Political influence and organizing can take place in a number of different ways – political context matters.
- An ‘Organizational Capacity’ framework provides a way for unions to ‘map’ changes in politics and policy – and develop responses to challenges and opportunities that exist for unions to mobilize and influence citizens as well as governments.
Thanks

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Problems with Explanations about Variation in Labour Market Deregulation

- Employer, partisan and institutional frameworks cannot explain divergence in disposable income inequality, levels of poverty, and extent of low-wage work.
- Have seen diversity in policies and unionization; degree of temporary work flexibility; reform of EI and employment related social programmes; and public sector restructuring.
The Liberals not only regularly gained more than 97 percent of all business support, they used business donations to regularly outspend the NDP on a 2-to-1 basis during election years.

In 2005, business donations to the Liberals doubled to $10.1 million (the highest level in all provincial jurisdictions), making up 45 percent of all political party revenues.
Business and NL Conservatives

- Conserviates also take 97 percent of all business support.
- Business donations to Conservative 3 X higher than all other party revenue combined. Make up 50 percent of all party donations.
Varieties of Citizen and Voter Marginalization

![Graphs showing Gini Coefficients over time for various categories such as NL Market Income Inequality, NL Inequality After Taxes and Transfers, NL Effectiveness of Programs at Reducing Inequality, and NL Voting Turnout. The graphs compare data from different years, with the x-axis representing years from 2000 to 2010 and the y-axis representing Gini Coefficients ranging from 0 to 0.6. There is also a graph showing BC Gini Coefficient (Right Axis) and 2 per. Mov. Avg. (BC Voter Turnout) with similar data range and period.]
How Did Business in NL Influence Politics

- Big Oil dominates. But stays out of direct provincial politics.
- Construction industry works with government to retain centralized collective bargaining frameworks in construction.
- PC parties fundraise heavily from business, but do so from all businesses across province.
- Business does not establish think tanks or advocacy coalitions to lobby for deregulation.
The Decline of Middle-class and Labour Organizations in BC

- mass-membership organizations with true grassroots presence have atrophied. In their place have arisen advocacy groups with professional management teams and mailinglist memberships
- Decline of organized labour
- Fragmentation of civil society groups and loss of economic focus
- Rising income inequality favors wealthy who turn against income redistribution
No Decline of Middle Class Organizations or Unions

- Municipal and regional organizations proliferate for regional economic development
- PC party relies on small business associations, community organizations, and voluntary government boards and councils
- Cross-interest associations in communities – business, construction, fishermen, tourism
- Unions active in community and in capital
Political Differences Matter

- Changes to business, political parties, and electoral mobilization are critical factors in accounting for alternative reform paths.
- BC – construction, mining, and real estate industries very active in pushing for labour market reform; BC Liberal Party relies on wealthiest and business; and with widespread voter disengagement, opens way for government to push major deregulation effort.
Political Differences Matter

- In Newfoundland and Labrador (2003-2010), the Conservative government strongly supported MNCs in the offshore oil industry, but it also upheld long-standing industrial relations frameworks for the construction industry and trades, as business supported this. The PC government also made modest attempts to improve employment standards and alleviate poverty in the province.

- Active role of community organizations, regional economic development boards, and unions influence policy making.