

## *Introduction*

PRADEEP KUMAR AND CHRISTOPHER SCHENK

Unions in Canada and elsewhere are at a crossroads, facing difficult challenges of adaptation, adjustment, and confrontation with a substantively different external and internal environment. Globalization, free trade, and neo-liberal policies of employers and governments constitute formidable challenges. Corporate restructuring, downsizing, employers' increased demand for "concessions" from workers, and the rising precarious and contingent workforce remain a day-to-day experience for many workers, causing significant anxiety and insecurities. In the current environment, unions cannot afford to be complacent.

This is particularly the case in countries where unions have experienced a substantive decrease in their membership. A range of academic books, union policy papers, and commentaries have examined the process of change and have exchanged ideas on how to reverse the decline of union strength and influence, reinvigorate membership participation and democratic decision-making, increase union visibility in communities, and expand unionization rates through increased organizing and closer links with social movement groups.

In contrast to other countries, the debate on union renewal in Canada has been slower to surface. In significant part this is because unions in Canada have not undergone the same dramatic losses as unions in some other countries. While the unionized percentage of the workforce from Australia to Britain to the United States and even parts of continental Europe has experienced significant decline, union density in Canada has slipped only marginally. Another reason may be that union renewal in Canada has been an ongoing process for more than two decades, reflected in various mergers, an uneven though significant pace of new organizing, modifications in organizational structures and strategies and resistance to concession bargaining. Nonetheless, unionization rates are lower today than they were in the 1980s. More aggressive approaches and initiatives are needed to halt this slippage, however small, and thereby widely diffuse the process of change.

To say that discussion and debate on union renewal in Canada has been limited, in comparison to more extensive debates in countries such as United States, Britain and Australia, is not to say it is non-existent. Unions in Canada have been concerned about the growing threat to their organizational and bargaining strength since the early 1980s, and have been reassessing their strategies, organizational structures, and methods and approaches to more effectively organize the unorganized and provide better services to their members. Past conventions of the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) and other provincial federations have discussed ways and means of rebuilding labour's strength. The British Columbia Federation of Labour (B.C. Fed) established an Organizing Institute nearly ten years ago. Federations of labour on the prairies have been exploring

the feasibility of such an initiative for themselves. The CLC and OFL have also passed resolutions urging these central labour bodies to explore the desirability of organizing institutes to train a new generation of organizers. The CLC also hosted a conference in Ottawa on union organizing in October 2003, where a number of ideas to speed the process of change and renewal were debated. Key presentations and commentary from this conference were later documented in the journal *Studies in Political Economy* (2004). The Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) has produced a discussion paper on union renewal which was debated at their constitutional convention in August 2003. A national survey of innovation and change in Canadian unions was conducted by Pradeep Kumar and Gregor Murray in 2001. It revealed that unions in Canada have been engaged in organizational change for several years, focusing on organizational reviews, implementation of new technologies, and modifications in their bargaining and organizing strategies, structures, and processes. Other examples of union renewal proposals and initiatives can be found in the resolutions, convention policy papers, and other writings and activities within unions and union central labour bodies themselves.

The purpose of this book is to document and analyze Canadian experiences with union renewal. We assess the vast and growing literature on union renewal to derive lessons for accelerating the process of change in Canada. The book includes studies of trends and patterns of union density in Canada, together with an analysis of the potential for organizing in the private sector, incidence of organizational change in unions, the role of women in union renewal, initiatives for leadership development through education and training, the union revival in Quebec through capacity and power-building, and inter-union competition and case studies of innovations currently underway in unions and communities across the country. The case studies are particularly valuable, as there exists no single model of union renewal. Change is often a slower and more uneven process embedded in particular contexts than one might have first expected. It is therefore important to examine various paths to union renewal and learn from them. In this text we provide a series of case studies constituting what might be termed "best practices" to inform and assist the change.

With this publication we hope to create a better understanding of the dynamics of change in union organizations and thus initiate further debate and discussions within the labour movement on the need for diffusing the process of change more widely and deeply. To our knowledge, this is the first text of its kind in Canada. Many books are written about unions by people outside labour's ranks. This volume includes contributions from unionists and selected academics working in association with them. It is written for union activists as a guide to action, for students of labour studies and other disciplines, and more generally for those who have an interest in unions and their positive role in social and economic change.

### Why unions matter

This volume is not designed as an introduction to unions (see Black and Silver 2001; Jackson 2005); rather, its focus is on the adaptation and change initiatives undertaken by unions to restore their strength and influence. However, unions are

so often maligned in the press—creating the misleading perception that unions are no longer necessary or capable of protecting working people—that a word on their role and purpose may well be of value. "In the dominant discourse," notes Beynon in the context of Britain (2003, 272), "trade unions are seen either as villains or as outdated." In the United States, Ruth Milkman and Kim Voss state that "organized labor's obituary appears regularly in the news as well as in scholarly commentary..." (2004, 1). In Canada, there are frequent references in the media that unions are a special interest group, are "inflexible," are always demanding more, cause inefficiencies, and are undemocratic and autocratic with self-serving leadership. Yet, for all their shortcomings, unions are major institutions in almost all countries, where they play an important role in determining wages and working conditions, promoting progressive social and economic change, and advancing the immediate interests of workers through legislative and political activities. In developed capitalist societies, where a vast majority of their populations are engaged in paid work for their livelihood, unions are a central institution of work and society and have been associated with significant improvements in worker and societal well-being.

The basic terms of the modern employment relationship consist of workers agreeing to work for an employer for a certain number of hours, in a specific location, to conduct particular tasks for a certain wage or salary. This employment relationship also involves a power relationship, albeit unequal, in which employers have the right to hire, organize and direct the work, and terminate workers not wanted or needed. Without unions, individual workers would have to negotiate the terms and conditions of their work arrangements, such as their hours of work, their wages, their benefits and working conditions in this highly unequal relationship. Workers would also be left to their own devices when it came to arbitrary and unfair treatment by employers, such as unjust dismissal, discrimination, favouritism, and so on (Jackson 2005, 143-145).

This is not to say that all employers are personally vengeful or grossly unfair, but rather to recognize that a conflict of interest exists between their desire and need to produce goods or services at least cost and maximum profit and the aspirations of working people for a better quality of life that comes in substantial part with higher compensation, shorter hours, and improved working conditions. The introduction of a collective organization by workers to improve their situation creates an improved balance of power for employees in the workplace. This enables the development of protective rules and procedures, negotiations over terms and conditions of employment codified in a legal collective agreement, and due process regarding worker complaints known as a grievance arbitration procedure. "What a union does is give workers a "voice" in their workplaces, a way to put themselves on a more equal footing with their employers" (Yates 1998, 20). In short, unions add an element of democracy in the workplace as workers have a say over wages, working conditions, benefits, schedules, and arbitrary employer behaviour.

For unionized workers, this system has proved remarkably successful. Not only have unions fought for dignity and respect in the workplace (one of the key reasons why workers support a union, for women's equality, against racial discrimination and more), but they have also substantially improved wages and working conditions.

A policy document adopted at the recent convention of the Canadian Labour Congress proclaimed:

We are proud of the profound difference the labour movement has made at the workplace and society. Better wages, more job security, pensions and benefits, protection against racism and discrimination, same-sex benefits, pay equity, health and safety measures—these are just some of the advantages unions have fought for and won. (CLC 2005)

The proponents of a global economy have asserted that in the new economy, where workers are considered to be empowered, unions are not needed, they are anachronisms. However, as Yates has noted (2001, 40), “unions are needed now more than ever.” As he puts it:

How are workers to protect themselves from the negative effects of lean production? How are workers to combat the corporate-state alliance that has created havoc on their living standards through trade agreements, anti-labour legislation, refusal to enforce labour laws, the destruction of the welfare state, and the privatization of public services? How are workers, including specially those who are contingent, going to make themselves more secure, guarantee safe workplaces, and ensure their future?

Rather than viewing unions as relics of the past, we need to see them as organizations with a future: basic collectivities with a proven track record of defending and improving the lives of millions of working people across Canada and around the globe.

Yet, despite all the improvements unions have championed and won, they are currently faced with a hostile environment that demands new innovations, strategies and ideas if it is to be successfully confronted.

### Contents of this volume

This book has been organized in four parts. Part I, titled *Union Renewal and the State of Unions in Canada*, includes five contributions on the assessment of the various dimensions of the union renewal process and the general nature and scope of organizational change in Canadian unions.

Chapter 1, by the editors, is an extensive review of recent academic and union literature, highlighting the varying experience and approaches to union renewal in differing institutional and environmental contexts and its general lessons for Canada. The chapter discusses the meaning and concepts of union renewal, its rational and major thesis, key renewal strategies, comparative experience, obstacles to change, and facilitating factors and the challenges of union renewal in the Canadian setting. This chapter, necessarily more theoretical than others, is key to understanding the

“big picture,” particularly the economic and political context within which unions find themselves embedded and the various strategies advocated for union renewal.

Chapter 2, by Andrew Jackson, provides an overview of the trends and patterns of union density in Canada and its implications for union renewal. Of particular interest is his analysis of the opportunities for new organizing in various industries and occupations. He makes two major points. First, the “highly gendered pattern of union growth and decline merits careful reflection,” a theme discussed more fully in Yates’s paper in this volume. Second, “the challenge of reversing a slow union density decline through new organizing is formidable, but recent breakthroughs in both private services and the broader public sector give hope that union renewal can begin to reverse union decline.”

Chapter 3, by Pradeep Kumar and Gregor Murray, highlights some of the innovations in structures, policies, and practices underway in union organizations in Canada, and the factors underlying the patterns of change. The paper draws on an extensive survey of innovations and change conducted by the authors in 2001 in partnership with Human Resources and Skills Development Canada and major unions and federations. The paper notes that the innovations are a product of “an interplay between organizational characteristics, environment, and union culture and philosophy.” The authors also point out that, while unions in Canada have pursued a wide variety of organizational changes, “the implementation of so-called best practices is highly uneven.” They emphasize the need for a discussion and debate on the form of unionism before making changes in structures, policies and practices. They find that the unions that are pursuing larger social visions and enlarged solidarities are most likely to be associated with innovations in such key areas as membership involvement, politics, implementation of new technologies, activist servicing, and new methods and targets for organizing.

Chapter 4, by Charlotte Yates, examines the ways in which union organizing is gender-biased and highlights possible union strategies to overcome the bias and improve organizing success. She argues that “women are critical to the revitalization of unions, but they must undo the gender-bias in their approach to organizing if they are going to build on this potential.” The paper draws on the survey of union organizers in Ontario and British Columbia conducted by the author in 2000 and 2001. Based on her data, Yates finds that, in both Ontario and British Columbia, organizing drives were more likely to be successful in workplaces where women were a majority compared to the male-dominated workplaces. The differences in success rates for female- and male-dominated workplaces were particularly notable in the private sector, where there is a significant concentration of women workers and where unions are weak. She argues that union strategies need to take into account women’s experiences if unions are serious about organizing the large and growing non-union private service sector. Yates also cautions unions that they need to do more than simply add women in their decision-making structures. “Rather, unions need to shift the lens with which they see the workforce so that they reveal the complex ways in which gender shapes workforce experiences, relations with co-workers and employers, and labour market needs and concerns.”

Chapter 5, by Christian Levesque and Gregor Murray, analyzes the Quebec experience with union renewal, focusing on the critical role of power resources, that

is “resources that a union can access and mobilize in order to influence the process of change.” They emphasize the significance of three resources for the development of union power: 1) the strategic capacity to develop a vision or an agenda; 2) internal solidarity or democracy; and 3) external solidarity or the capacity to embed the local unions in networks through alliances with the larger union movement, other unions, and the community. They believe, based on their research, that the Quebec labour movement has been relatively successful in developing these resources effectively. Many unions in other regions of Canada are also engaged in a similar power building process. “The challenge for trade unionists is to think more systematically about the kind of power resources likely to enhance worker voice in globalized workplaces,” according to Levesque and Murray.

Part II of the volume includes case studies of renewal in two public sector and five predominantly private sector unions. The two public sector unions are the Canadian Union Of Public Employees (CUPE), the union with the largest membership in Canada, and the British Columbia Government and Service Employees Union (BCGEU), a component of the National Union of Public and General Employees Union (NUPGE), Canada’s second largest union. Among the private sector unions are the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW), the United Steelworkers Union (USW), United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW), Communications, Energy and Paperworkers’ Union (CEP), and the UNITE-HERE, a new union formed in 2004 with the merger of the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees’ Union (UNITE) and the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees (HERE). All of these unions, with the exception of UNITE-HERE, have been successful in increasing their membership through mergers and aggressive organizing (See Table 1). The seven union case study chapters form the core of this text. They have been written primarily by trade unionists for unionists, as well as labour studies students and others interested in what unions are doing that activates and empowers their members. The case studies provide a menu of best practices that, with the necessary modifications, could be adapted by other unions or union locals to develop more fully their democratic potential and increase their membership.

Of the seven union case studies, three describe the process of union renewal as an evolutionary strategic exercise. In the case of CUPE (Chapter 7), the renewal began 16 years ago with the establishment of a Commission on Structure and Services in 1989 to review the effectiveness of the union and has been an ongoing process ever since. The consultative process of the Commission stimulated a fundamental discussion on “what the union is, what it does, what it should be, and what it should do,” according to Jane Stinson and Morna Ballantyne, the authors of the study.

Over time, the union has been involved in a number of initiatives and programs aimed at increasing the power of the union through increased membership involvement and greater solidarity among members. It has also been able to build a shared vision of “a progressive, forward-looking, active union, responsive to the needs of both members and working people generally.” The authors note that CUPE’s renewal program has been profoundly influenced by the belief that “a union is only as strong as it is democratic; only as strong as it is active; and only as strong as it is ready

**Table 1: Membership of Major\* Canadian Unions, 1985–2004**

Unions	Membership (1000)		
	1985	1995	2004
<b>Private Sector Unions:</b>			
Canadian Auto Workers (CAW)	136	205	260
United Steelworkers (USW)	148	161	235
United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW)	146	185	230
Communication, Energy and Paperworkers (CEP)	134	125	150
International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT)	92	95	125
UNITE-HERE	77	68	55
Laborers’ International Union (LIUNA)	51	55	85
International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW)	69	67	55
United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners (UBC)	73	56	52
<b>Public Sector Unions:</b>			
Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE)	296	445	540
National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE)	245	300	337
Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC)	182	168	157
Social Affairs Federation (FAS/CSN)	93	97	101
Service Employees International Union (SEIU)	70	80	78
Quebec Teaching Congress (CEQ)	90	112	126
Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario (ETFO)	46	72	65
Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW)	24	51	55
Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federations (OSSTF)	36	49	53
Ontario Nurses’ Assn (ONA)	39	50	50

Source: HRSDC Workplace Information Directorate, Directory of Labour Organizations

\* Unions with a membership of 50,000 and over.

and able to exercise collective action in defence of workers’ rights in the workplace and citizens’ rights in the community.”

In Chapter 8, David Robertson and Bill Murnighan of the CAW state that the renewal in their union has been an ongoing process. “In many respects, the very formation of the CAW represents a large scale renewal project.” The theme of the union’s first collective bargaining convention in 1985 was: “We’re Building a Future Together.” Robertson and Murnighan maintain that, twenty years later, “we are still building that future together.” The union has grown dramatically over the past 20 years, both in numbers and in the scope of its activities. From a largely auto workers’ union, with a concentration of membership in Ontario, it has transformed into a truly national union with a diverse membership in almost all sectors of the economy. The CAW has been credited with many innovations at the bargaining table and in politics. The case study by Robertson and Murnighan not only describes the various initiatives taken by the union over the past two decades, but also includes parts of a policy paper, *Union Resistance and Union Renewal*, debated and adopted at the union’s constitutional convention in August 2003. The paper discusses the determinants of a strong union movement, the evolution of the union, and the challenges of union resistance and union renewal. These include making gains in bargaining, expanding democracy, organizing, deepening membership involvement and participation, generational renewal, strengthening social unionism,

building alliances with social movements, international solidarity, strengthening our capacity to mobilize, and defining ourselves by what we do. The paper asserts that one of the union's greatest strengths is its culture. The case study ends with excerpts from interviews with key staff and elected leaders of the union, including the CAW President Buzz Hargrove.

The BCGEU case study by Gary Steeves (Chapter 6) similarly describes union renewal as an ongoing process in his union over the past two decades. It started with the union's participation in Operation Solidarity in 1983 when it "saw itself clearly as a social union rejecting the more traditional role of 'business unionism'." The following year it adopted a policy paper entitled *Building for the Future*, emphasizing aggressive organizing with a high degree of membership involvement. A more formal strategic exercise in 1998 to review the union's approach to servicing led to the adoption of five objectives as pilot projects. These included reinforcing members' ownership of the union, expanding local activists' sense of responsibility for their own collective agreements, expanding the skills and experience of stewards and local officers, more effective utilization of union staff's time and expertise, and increasing the authority and accountability of locals. The union continues to monitor the progress of these projects. In 2001, it adopted 22 recommendations to more effectively implement the pilot projects. Among them were more resources for education programs and other support measures to promote the vision of union renewal. The case study discusses the implementation of methods to meet major challenges and outlines lessons from the process of renewal and change within the union. Steeves concludes his study by stating that "renewal is a democratic, membership-driven belief in the possibility of engaging more effectively in the world around us. Its failure is a failure of people to seize an opportunity to shape their own future."

Another three case studies (USW, UFCW, and CEP) focus on specific renewal initiatives. The focus of the USW case study (Chapter 12) is the Humanities Fund, an initiative to build international exchanges and solidarity and alliances in response to growing power of multinationals through capital mobility. The paper by Judith Marshall and Jorge Garcia-Orgales first describes the working of the Humanities Fund and then assesses how the global connections with Chile and Peru in the mining sector have contributed to the union renewal in the USW. According to Marshall and Garcia-Orgales, the Humanities Fund has helped build international union solidarity through the support of long-term development projects in association with labour and community organizations in 14 countries, through education programs and worker exchanges and through lobby activities and policy development. They believe that the worker exchanges and alliances forged through the Humanities Fund have become "a powerful force for revitalizing the union and equipping our members to better contend with corporate globalization."

The UFCW case study in Chapter 10 by Anna Liu and Chris O'Halloran, examines the development of youth programs and initiatives within UFCW Canada to increase youth involvement and participation in the union. Of interest are the union's national youth internship program, designed to train young union activists by providing them with basic labour education and training, local union youth committees, and youth conferences for exchange of experiences and views on un-

ion strategies and campaigns. The authors believe that the youth initiative has led to the integration of young workers into every level of the union and increased their participation in decision-making structures, servicing, and organizing. They note that the success of the program can be attributed to the union leadership's commitment to the promotion of youth involvement and their understanding of its value for building an inclusive social unionism that moves away from service unionism.

The CEP study (Chapter 9) by Keith Newman outlines the process of decision-making in the union on major policies, emphasizing the involvement of rank-and-file membership. The case study describes how the union formulated the energy policy in 2001 and the benefits of rank-and-file member participation in policy-making. Newman asserts that the new process not only builds the confidence of members to debate issues with other members and industry spokespeople, but also ensures that policy is well grounded in the union and reflects the democratic input and views of members.

The UNITE-HERE case study in Chapter 11 by Steve Tufts is distinct in that it relates to renewal in one of the union's locals (Local 75), using multiple strategies, integrated to reinforce one another. The study is important for many reasons. It relates to a large local of workers in major hotels in Toronto, owned by multinational firms. The workforce consists largely of immigrant and visible minority women with poor wages and working conditions. As Tufts points out, the gender, ethnic and income-segmentation of the hotel labour market creates difficult challenges for building union solidarity and for new organizing and effective bargaining. In this context, Local 75's experience with organizing and pattern bargaining is instructive.

Part III, *Unions and Community: Campaigns and Organizing*, includes four papers. Three relate to union-community alliances to defend and advance worker rights and build worker confidence and solidarity, and one focuses on innovative organizing with rank-and-file worker participation.

Cynthia Cranford, Mary Gellatly, Deena Ladd and Leah Vosko, in their paper (Chapter 13), discuss the concept and practice of community unionism and demonstrate the potential for building a union-community alliance for labour movement renewal through an analysis of the working of the Workers' Action Centre (WAC) in Toronto. The WAC, a product of the merger of Toronto Organizing for Fair Employment (TOFFE) and the Workers' Information Centre, is a "community union" working with people in precarious employment—workers (largely new immigrant women and men of colour) with very low wages and few benefits, who are routinely denied basic rights and employment security. The Centre outreaches these workers to foster "self-organizing" against precarious employment through specific campaigns, targeting employers who contravene basic employment standards and pressuring government to enforce and improve labour and employment legislation. The Centre, according to the authors, has had considerable success in terms of the number of people involved, the response by employers, and the concrete gains for individual workers. They point out, however, that community-union initiatives like the WAC face two major challenges. First is the difficulty of organizing workers who move in between multiple sectors. Second is the "arduous task of balancing individual advocacy and collective mobilization." Both these challenges are made

more difficult by the tenuous funding of such initiatives. The authors suggest that "one of the logical sources of funding for workers' centres is the union movement, since this aid would allow for more community-based innovative programming."

The paper by Geoff Bickerton and Catherine Stearns (Chapter 14) evaluates the experience of the Winnipeg based Workers' Organizing and Resource Centre (WORC), an initiative of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) and community activists drawn from several communities. "The importance of WORC" according to Bickerton and Stearns, "extends beyond the city limits of Winnipeg. Within CUPW, WORC represents a tangible symbol of the union's belief in community unionism." The mandate of the Centre is "1) to help establish, maintain, and facilitate community organizations that represent and enforce people's rights within our community; 2) to advocate on behalf of the unorganized workers for protection of their rights in the workplace and beyond; and 3) to organize the unorganized." The WORC has been a successful venture. "In seven years of operation, WORC has provided assistance to thousands of workers, assisted in the development of new and existing working class institutions, and gained the respect of organized labour and the progressive community ..." It "continues as a vibrant centre of progressive working class activity. With continued support it will serve and grow as a model of union-community solidarity and cooperation."

Natalie Mehra's paper (Chapter 15) on the Ontario Health Coalition (OHC) campaign to defend public Medicare is another example of the potential of union-community alliances. The campaign came about in 2001 when a Royal Commission headed by former Saskatchewan Premier Roy Romanow was appointed by the federal government to assess public Medicare in Canada and recommend policies and measures to ensure the long-term sustainability of a universally accessible, publicly-funded health care system. The community outreach campaign was launched to counteract the intense private health care lobby's efforts to make Canadians believe that public health care was inadequate, inefficient, and unsustainable. It involved all major public and private sector unions, ethnic and cultural groups, diverse faith community organizations, seniors' organizations, community social service organizations, and the Council of Canadians. While the campaign was not able to achieve all its goals, it was highly successful in mounting an effective opposition to forces that were campaigning to dismantle the public health insurance system. Mehra points out that the study of the health coalition campaign is important for the union renewal discussions for several reasons. It was forged in response to a public policy issue that had serious implications for social and economic equality—the cherished goal of labour movements everywhere. The campaign was able to mobilize a massive community response reaching millions of workers and households. It involved both public and private sector unions, working collectively, internally, and externally. The campaign was a "true partnership between unions and community groups" that are not a part of the labour movement. The massive mobilization was "successful in forcing into retreat—at least temporarily—the forces working to privatize the public health insurance system."

The paper by Julie Guard, Jorge Garcia-Orgales, Mercedes Steedman and D'Arcy Martin (Chapter 16) relates to organizing call centres with a case example of efforts to organize Omega Direct Response, a call centre in Sudbury, Ontario.

The case study shows that, by working together, rank-and-file workers as inside organizers and experienced professional organizers can develop winning strategies that can enable unions to organize hard to organize workplaces. The paper also includes perspectives from a conference on organizing call centres held in Toronto in September 2003. The conference brought together rank-and-file organizers, union staff, and academic researchers from Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom to share experiences and develop strategies for successful organizing of workers in the fast-growing call centres sector.

Part IV on *Leadership Development and Education* has two papers, one on the experience with the British Columbia Organizing Institute, the only such academy in Canada for training union organizers, and the other on union education as a source of union renewal through programs such as the CAW's Paid Education Leave Program.

The evaluation of the B.C. Organizing Institute (Chapter 17), an initiative of the British Columbia Federation of Labour, by its current Director, John Weir, provides valuable insights into the problems that have to be overcome in developing coordinated education and training programs for leadership development, promoting inter-union cooperation, and creating a culture of organizing. As Weir notes, the Institute was designed not only to train organizers, but also to build a network of organizers through inter-union cooperation, educating leaders of the affiliated unions, providing help in union campaigns, and to be a focal point for information to non-union workers about the process of forming a union. Weir's critical assessment of the impact of the Institute shows that, despite many ups and downs, the Institute has been able to foster a culture of organizing, and has contributed "to developing a new generation of organizers with a greater commitment to solidarity." According to Weir, the Institute has especially helped smaller organizations which lack sufficient internal resources to support and monitor the progress of organizers. Weir's analysis may be useful for other central bodies contemplating the establishment of similar institutes.

The final paper (Chapter 18), by Johanna Weststar, examines the Paid Education Leave (PEL) program, a negotiated employer-funded worker education program administered by the Canadian Auto Workers Union (CAW). The primary purpose of her study is to evaluate the ability of the PEL to develop membership knowledge, activism and leadership to facilitate union renewal. Weststar's paper, based on survey research and interviews, maintains that the PEL program does contribute to leadership development and to the union renewal process by serving to alter the perceptions and attitudes of its participants. "PEL graduates return to their workplaces with an increased awareness of their role as workers in society, an increased desire to become active in their union and community, strengthened feelings of solidarity toward other workers and community groups, a broader understanding and appreciation of the diverse composition of their union, and with tangible strategies for workplace change." She feels, however, that, in the absence of a clearer union agenda on the use and purposes of the program, the seeds of activism and solidarity planted during the training are not adequately supported following graduates' return to the workplace. Weststar's study could be useful for other unions in evaluating their PEL programs.

As rich in detail and ideas as these chapters are, they are written at what the editors hope is just the beginning of a long-needed debate on the state and direction of the labour movement. Given the outset of such a discussion, there are necessarily more questions than definitive answers. Far from being able to document and assess patterns of a renewal process or precisely detail its current state across the country, at this time one is faced with uneven and partial material. Admittedly, there is more evidence to be gathered, further initiatives to be located, documented and assessed, yet our findings suggest that there has yet to appear a generalized state of union revitalization and growth across Canada. Despite continued union vitality and energy, the various "paths to union renewal" have yet to be clearly defined, formulated, or acted upon. The intention of this book is to provide a stimulus and inspiration for this process.

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PATHS TO  
UNION  
RENEWAL

CANADIAN EXPERIENCES  
*edited by* PRADEEP KUMAR & CHRISTOPHER SCHENK



Union renewal is absolutely key to the future well being of working people. The Canadian labour movement continues to grow because our unions are responding creatively to new challenges along numerous dimensions. The case studies in this important book provide important information and inspiration for all labour activists.

*Ken Geoghegan, President, Canadian Labour Congress*

Unique among labour in advanced industrial countries, the Canadian labour movement has continued to experience modest growth over the last decade. Anyone interested in organizational change and labour will find this book a valuable study of how unions in Canada have continued to innovate and change. The diverse cases and experiences examined in this book hold valuable lessons for labour everywhere.

*Ulrike Bernard, Labor & Worklife Program, Harvard Law School*

**T**his new book focuses on the efforts and progress of union revitalization and organizing, and documents the renewal initiatives undertaken by unions in Canada. Unions, separately or in coalition with other unions or social groups, have begun to re-examine the basis of their organization and activity in the face of a harsher economic and political climate. Signs of union renewal include increased rank and file participation in the life of the union, increased democratic decision-making, evidence of new horizontal union structures, the development of a worker-centred societal vision, and a new emphasis on organizing both internally and externally.

*Paths to Union Renewal* addresses a subject of considerable political and social importance about which there have been a number of debates. A key impetus for this re-examination has originated in the United States where decades long union decline has engendered new ideas adopted by a number of unions and the national central labour body, the AFL-CIO. This in turn has led to debates on renewal strategies in Western Europe and Anglo-Saxon countries from Britain to Australia.

Despite this, little detailed research of the processes, structures, and implications of union renewal has been undertaken across Canada. *Paths to Union Renewal* fills this gap by critically examining union renewal in a variety of unions, providing a basis for informed discussion and debate on the role and place of trade unions in contemporary society.

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# PATHS TO UNION RENEWAL

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edited by Pradeep Kumar and Christopher Schenk

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**The Editors**