

**'LABOR AND SOCIALISM
IN CANADA AND
THE UNITED STATES'
LARRY SEFTON MEMORIAL LECTURE**

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Labor and Socialism in Canada and the United States

by Seymour Martin Lipset

I am flattered to be invited back to the University of Toronto, where I began my academic career in 1948, to discuss a subject which is closely related to my first book, *Agrarian Socialism* (1950), written here. That book, which is still in print, was an effort to deal with the question of why the United States does not have a viable socialist movement, by trying to find out why Canada has one. I have continued to seek to understand my own country by studying the other nation to come out of the American Revolution, our Tory neighbor to the north (Lipset, 1989, 1990).

In this talk given at Woodsworth College, named for Canada's preeminent socialist, in honor of Larry Sefton, who was both a dedicated union leader and a socialist, I want to deal with the sources of the variation in the position of the socialist and trade union movements within the United States and Canada.¹ While there may be some debate as to their absolute strengths, there can be no argument about the fact that both are much stronger north of the border. Canada's national social democratic party, the New Democrats (NDP), while still the third party, gets 20 percent in the national elections, and at times much more in the opinion polls, enough to place the party occasionally in second place in the surveys. More strikingly, the NDP has been the governing party and/or the official opposition in every province from Ontario west, while in Quebec the Parti Quebecois (PQ), which is both a separatist and a social democratic party (it applied for membership in the Socialist International, but was rejected because the NDP would not approve) has been the government and is now the official opposition. There has obviously been nothing approaching this record in the U.S. The American Socialist Party's (SP) highest national vote was six percent in 1912. It secured two percent in 1932, in the depth of the Depression. Between 1936 and 1952, the party's vote fell off to under one percent, and it stopped running national candidates. Although the SP captured the mayoralty in many cities, particularly before 1918, it never came close to winning state-wide office. Currently, the largest socialist group in America, the Democratic Socialists, has around 6,000 members, and does not take part as a party in elections. The biggest third party in the U.S. is the Libertarians, a free market anti-state group, who get a few hundred thousand votes.

The comparative story on organized labor is relatively similar. Although American unions do have millions of members, they are among the weakest, if not the weakest, in any industrialized democracy in terms of union density, the proportion eligible who belong. As of 1990, roughly 15-16 percent of all employed Americans belong to unions.

Different estimates for Canada agree that union density may have reached a peak of 40 percent in 1983, and has since fallen off to around 36 percent, still more than double the

¹ For a detailed review of the literature on the weakness of socialist movements in the United States, see Lipset (1977 31-149, 346-363).

American proportion. And the record indicates that except for the period 1938 to 1958, roughly the time of CIO organization, the proportion unionized in Canada has been higher than in the U.S. Estimates by Huxley, Kettler and Struthers (1986), and Bain and Price (1980) indicate Canadian union density exceeded the American from 1918 to 1938, and again from 1958 to the present. The period from the mid-thirties to the mid-fifties was one of growth by the south of the border labor organization encouraged by New Deal government support but, more importantly, by the Depression-stimulated social movement forces that pressed for working-class organization.

Starting in 1955, however, American unions began to decline fairly steadily from around 33 percent to less than half that proportion currently, while the Canadian ones grew from 1964 on. The differences vary by sector, but in almost all that may be distinguished, government, manufacturing, and private service, in the large, and various specific industry groups in the small, a much larger segment is organized north of the border than south of it (Meltz, 1990).

Given this background, there are a number of questions to be addressed: (1) why does Canada have an electorally viable social democratic party while the U.S. does not; (2) why is union density in Canada so much greater than below the border; and (3) why have union movements been declining earlier and more steadily in the U.S. than in Canada, although as of the late eighties in the north as well?

Explanations for the party systems vary between dissimilarities in electoral and government systems and in certain basic values. Those specific to unions also treat the possible effects of a different political climate, that Canadian labor legislation and their administration are more union friendly than the American. The value differences are held to account also for the dissimilar cross border employee responses to union appeals, as well as differences in worker and employer behavior, and variations in the way the political systems treat labor organizations. Most recently, Leo Troy (1990a) has suggested that a different distribution of industries and occupations in Canada and the United States accounts for the variation in union density.

Socialism in North America

To look first at the dissimilarities in the position of socialism, many observers of the North American political scene have pointed to the varying effects on the prospects for third parties of the constitutional systems. The argument has been effectively made that the British political model, followed in Canada, encompassing the parliamentary single member district system together with the disciplined legislative parties required to sustain cabinets, is much more encouraging of third or more parties than the American division of powers, Presidential-Congressional one. In the first, the effective election unit is the constituency. Parties which have no chance to win a national or provincial plurality can still effectively contest constituencies which are sociologically distinct, e.g., wheat farmers, coal miners, ethnic groupings, etc. Minor parties may be major parties in local areas.

The requirement in parliamentary systems that MPs vote with their party, even when to do so obligates them to support policies antithetical to the clear interests or values of their districts, presses constituents to look to other sources of representation, often to third parties which appeal to local interests (Lipset, 1954:197-198). Since 1921, Canada has experienced situations in which sections, provinces, or ethnic groups have found themselves in conflict with their traditional major party allegiance, and not wanting to go over to its

rival have supported third parties, e.g. Progressives, United Farmers, Labour, Cooperative Commonwealth Federation, Social Credit, New Democratic, Parti Quebecois, and Reform.

In the United States, the country is effectively one national constituency for the most important election, the Presidency. And in this contest, in which only one candidate, one party, can win, those who favor minor parties are repeatedly pressed to vote for the "lesser evil," to feel that they will waste their ballot or possibly even to help elect the greater evil, by voting for a candidate who has no chance of election. Polls have documented the operation of this process.

On the Congressional level, since party discipline is not required, "all politics is local," to quote Tip O'Neill. That is, members of Congress, unlike MPs, are free to vote against their party leaders or programs, including the wishes of the President. Whatever interests or values are dominant in a district can gain effective representation. And the American primary system of choosing nominees, now extended to all offices, means that diverse interest and ideological groups may seek to gain representation within a major party, that they do not have to go outside the one they normally back to express their views. The opportunity to take part in primaries permits Americans to retain allegiance to their traditional party while still differing sharply with various of its national policies. Canadian socialist historian Kenneth McNaught (1975:35) contends that a large part of the explanation for the failure of the "American *political* Left" lies in "the cumulative constitutional and electoral problems." He notes that those difficulties have pressed the American Left, and, I would add, other tendencies as well, to favor "single-issue, pressure-group and extra-parliamentary methods." With the extension of the primaries in the past two decades, the American parties have become extremely weak. They have little or nothing to say about the selection of nominees (Shafer, 1983; Polsby, 1983).

The American constitutional or electoral system analysis may account for a two party rather than a multi-party system. It does not help to explain its character, why social democratic tendencies have been relatively weak in the United States. In previous works, I have attempted to explain the political variations in North America by also referring to a number of value differences (for bibliography, see Lipset, 1989, 1990).

The existence of an electorally viable social democratic party, the New Democrats (NDP), in Canada has been interpreted by various analysts as an outgrowth of the greater influence of the Tory-statist tradition and the stronger collectivity orientation north of the border (Horowitz, 1968). Conversely, the absence of a significant socialist movement to the south is explained in part by the vitality of the antistatist and individualistic values in the United States. There is, of course, good reason to believe, as H.G. Wells (1906:72-76), Louis Hartz (1964:35), Gad Horowitz (1968:52), Henry Phelps Brown (1983:240), and I, among others, have argued, that social democratic movements are the other side of statist conservatism, that Tories and socialists are likely to be found in the same polity, while a dominant Lockean liberal (anti-statist) tradition inhibits the emergence of socialism as a political force. Socialism is strong where Tory and monarchical statism legitimated strong government, and where elitism fostered organized counter reactions by the less privileged strata.

Contemporary America is the outcome of processes which began with an egalitarian (meritocratic), individualistic revolution (Hartz, 1964:35; Lipset, 1989, 1990:8-13, 22-36). The United States remained through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the extreme example of a classically liberal society which rejected the assumptions of the alliance of throne and altar, of ascriptive elitism, of statism, of *noblesse oblige*, and of communi-

tarianism. The American tradition was reinforced by the country's religious commitment to the "nonconformist," largely congregationally organized, Protestant sects, which emphasized a personal or individualistic relation to God, one not mediated by state supported, hierarchically organized churches.

Canada, dominated by a Tory counterrevolutionary ethos, developed a more communitarian and group oriented orientation. The two major Canadian national groups sought to defend their values and culture by reacting against two classically liberal revolutions. English-speaking Canada exists because it opposed the Declaration of Independence; French-speaking Canada, largely under the leadership of Catholic clerics, sought to isolate itself from the anti-clerical, democratic values of the French Revolution. The leaders of both cultures, after 1783 and 1789, consciously attempted to create a conservative, monarchical, ecclesiastical, and statist society in North America (Frye, 1982:66). Canadian elites saw the need to use the state to protect minority cultures, English Canadians against Yankees, French Canadians against Anglophones, and also to provide services in a sparsely settled continent-spanning nation which private capital failed to supply.

These Canadian traditions are reinforced by the country's religious history. Harold Innis (1956:385) may have said it all when he wrote that a "counter-revolutionary tradition implies an emphasis on ecclesiasticism." The majority of Canadians adhere to the Roman Catholic or Anglican churches, each of which is hierarchically organized and continued until recently to have a strong relationship to the state, while the country's sectarians largely joined together in the most successful ecumenical effort the Protestant world has seen, the United Church of Canada. American sects, strikingly different in behavior, not only have remained separate, but are religiously "fecund," have sponsored more new denominations than any other nation, that is, they have remained sectarian, and, as noted, have fostered individualism and anti-statism.

Both Canadian cultures furthered a variant of the Tory paternalistic and statist view of the world. As Phelps Brown (1983:249) notes, "no tradition or doctrine inculcated an abhorrence of collectivism such as prevailed south of the border. A Tory tradition... stressed authority and hierarchy, but with these went solidarity and benevolence, which occupy some common ground with collectivism." Seeking to explain the rise of social democracy in Quebec, William Christian and Colin Campbell (1983:36) suggest that it reflects the propensity for collectivism inherent in the province's values. They conclude that "Quebec's stock of [traditional] political ideas includes a strong collectivist element.... Quebec's collectivist past provided receptive and fruitful soil for socialist ideas once the invasion of liberal capitalism had broken the monopoly of the old conservative ideology." The United States, on the other hand, as Marx and Engels and assorted academic political theorists, such as Max Weber, have emphasized, has been the classic or extreme example of a "born modern" bourgeois or classically liberal society, stressing anti-statism, individualism, and competitive meritocracy.

Leftist collectivist, communitarian (welfare) and particularistic movements have emerged in western society in some part in response to conservative (Tory) emphases on elitism and statism. A tradition of state paternalism fostered by national elites has served to legitimate efforts by the less privileged strata to mobilize resources to improve their position through government action. Canadian Socialist labor historian Gad Horowitz (1965:2) has noted that "socialism has more in common with toryism than with [classical] liberalism for liberalism is possessive individualism, while socialism and toryism are variants of collectivism." As a number of analysts, including American socialists such as Leon Samson (1935) and Michael

Harrington (1972), have emphasized, the fact that the American national tradition is egalitarian, anti-elitist, individualistic, classically liberal, i.e., anti-statist, has weakened efforts to mobilize workers and others on behalf of socialist and collectivist objectives, including unions. Prior to the Great Depression, the American labor movement, both in its moderate AF of L form and radical Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) guise, opposed programs to extend the role of the state. The former was syndicalist, the latter anarcho-syndicalist. The majority of both, like other American groupings, were suspicious of government and, therefore, also rejected socialism.

Most Canadian and American trade unionists have belonged to the same international unions, part of the AFL until the CIO split in the mid-1930s, but the affiliates in the two countries have varied in ways which have reflected the diverse national traditions (Thompson and Blum, 1983:83). The leaders of American workers, as noted above, were anti-statist and opposed a separate labor or socialist party. The Canadian union officials, though not formally socialists, repeatedly endorsed the principle of independent labor political action from the turn of the century on and were much more favorable to state intervention than their counterparts to the south. As Gad Horowitz (1968:59) notes:

The TLC [Trades and Labour Congress], though it consisted almost entirely of Canadian locals of AFL unions, and was greatly influenced by Gompers, never adopted the Gompers approach in toto... [Unlike the AFL] the TLC... never took a stand against socialism. Unlike the AFL, it never adopted the phraseology of *laissez-faire* and Lockean individualism.

During the 1930s, many labor activists took part in the formation of the country's first electorally viable social democratic party, the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF). The relationship became stronger over the years. A poll of labor leaders in 1958 revealed that 45 percent of the TLC (AFL) officials surveyed supported the CCF, as did an overwhelming 93 percent of the Canadian Congress of Labor (CCL-CIO) executives (Horowitz, 1968:184). The two labor federations, the TLC and the CCL, merged into the Canadian Labour Congress in the mid-1950s and then went on to join with the CCF to transmute the socialist movement into the New Democratic Party (NDP) in the early 1960s. The united Canadian union movement has continued officially to support the NDP.

Although the Canadian economy has been weaker than the American, the postwar boom, extensive growth, upgrading of the occupational structure, higher income and standards of living, has also occurred in Canada. But in spite of such improvements, which, of course, did not prevent occasional periods of recession, Canadian socialism has held its own nationally, generally obtaining between a fifth and a quarter of the vote in English Canada. Social democracy gained a new bastion in French Canada with the rise of the *Parti Quebecois* (PQ) to major party status in the 1970s. And, as noted, unlike the situation in the United States, the Canadian labor movement reached new heights in membership in the 1970s and early 1980s.

Cross-Border Union Densities

The explanations for the cross-border differences in union strength, like those for socialism, primarily vary between emphasis on the effects of dissimilarities in values and of political structures, in this case labor representation legislation. British labor economist Henry Phelps Brown (1983:240) points out that "the strong tradition of Toryism in Canada laid its stress on solidarity and against individualism and the fissiparous impact of market

forces. Here it found common ground...with the propensity of the worker to organize for the protection of the conditions of his working life."

The big anomaly in the comparison between the two countries is the greater growth in union density in the United States from the mid-1930s to the mid-1950s which temporarily placed the American labor movement ahead of the Canadian. The same period also witnessed a change in the political and ideological behavior of much of organized labor in the United States. The American movement became involved in political action, largely in support of the Democratic party, while the CIO and sections of the AF of L adopted political programs calling for a high level of state involvement in planning the economy, as well as sharp increases in welfare and health programs.

These changes reflected the impact of the Great Depression. That unprecedented event, which undermined traditional American beliefs among large sectors of the population, led to the acceptance by a majority of the need for state action to reduce unemployment and to assist those adversely affected by the economic collapse and to support trade unionism. As Richard Hofstadter (1967:308) noted, it introduced a "social democratic tinge" in American politics that had never been present before. Analyses of public opinion polls and election results noted that class factors had become highly differentiating variables. Samuel Lubell (1941:9), who conducted in-depth interviews of many voters in the thirties and early forties, concluded that the electoral support for Roosevelt and New Deal programs constituted "a class-conscious vote for the first time in American history...The New Deal appears to have accomplished what the Socialists, the I.W.W. and the Communists never could approach. It has drawn a class line across the face of American politics."

This depression inspired development, however, seemingly declined with the post-war prosperity, one which effectively has lasted through to the present, with some fluctuation resulting from periods of recession and inflation. The Roosevelt New Deal electoral impact ended. The correlations between class position and party voting have declined sharply. From 1952 to the present, Republicans have won seven of the last 10 presidential elections, although it should be noted that Democrats, who are more effective at local appeals to national interests and values, have controlled the Congress much more often than not. What prosperity has done, in my judgement, is to refurbish the classic American *laissez-faire* anti-statist, market oriented, meritocratic, individualistic values, in short, the Whig tradition.

Considerable opinion poll data show Americans have regained their belief in opportunity for the individual (Lipset and Schneider, 1987:134-135, 149-150, 386, 410-411). And in tandem they have turned against unions. The approval rating of unions in the US in the Gallup Poll has gone down steadily since the mid-fifties and this decline has closely paralleled the fall-off in union density. The correlation is very high, around .75 (Lipset, 1986:438-442).

Prosperity has not been associated with a decline in social democratic electoral strength or trade union membership in Canada. Unlike the situation in the United States, there has not been a return to the values of classical liberalism, which, of course, have never been the national tradition. Canadian political parties, including to some degree the now governing Conservatives, whose leader, Brian Mulroney, has called the welfare state Canada's "sacred heritage," remain committed to an activist government, to communitarianism.

In the United States, as we have seen, the postwar boom seemingly revived belief in traditionally libertarian anti-statist American values, and class became less salient ideologically. The weakness of socialism and of trade unionism are associated. The divergence in the trajectories of union density across the border reflect the undermining of the social

democratic elements unleashed by the Great Depression in the south, and their continuation in the north. In the preceding Sefton Lecture, Paul Weiler (1989:7) notes that "projections from current trends estimate that U.S. union density will drop below 10% by the year 2000, and will not 'stabilize' until it reaches a point somewhere under 5% by the year 2020." Troy (1990b) notes that the current density level in the private sector "just under 13% is about equal to unions' share of private nonfarm employment in 1929." Extrapolating trends, he anticipates it "will slip to about 7% by the onset of the new century." If union density in the United States is declining to its pre-1930s level, or possibly lower, it is because the liberal or social democratic values which emerged in the 1930s have experienced a steady decay over the post-World War II era.

This is not to deny that changes in the structure of the labor force have contributed to the weakening of unions, particularly in the private sector. Classic centers of union strength like mining, steel, printing, ship building, the goods production industries, have declined, while the much less unionized service sectors have increased. During the last decade, the proportion employed in union favorable public employment positions has stood still in Canada and declined somewhat in the United States. But these changes only explain a small part of the variance between Canada and the United States.

These differences are not a function of structural variations in the two economies. In fact, Canadian labor economist Noah Meltz (1985:322) concludes that if "the industrial distribution of employment between the two countries had been the same and if... the rates of union organization [by industry] were the ones that actually existed, the overall union rate would have been even higher [in Canada] than it was in 1980 by approximately 10 percent."

A recent comparative analysis of unionism in North America by Leo Troy (1990a) argues that the major, almost predominant, source of the cross-border difference lies in the fact that Canada has a much larger state sector than the United States, 29.9 percent of the work force compared to 16.3 percent, as of 1985. While government employees in both countries are much more unionized than those in the private sector, those in Canada are better organized than those in the United States - 66 percent of the labor force in the former, 42 percent in the latter. But, as Meltz (1990) points out, private sector workers also are significantly more organized in the north than in the south, 21 percent to 15 percent. Other structural occupational sector analyses by Troy (1990a) also indicate a consistent Canadian advantage in percent unionized - Manager and Professionals, 35.6 to 14.8; Technical, Sales and Administrative, 25.5 percent to 10.8 percent; Service, 24.2 to 14.1; Manual Workers, 46.4 to 29.6; Farming, Forestry and Fishing, 17.8 to 6.2.

The greater strength of the Canadian unions is linked to a more union friendly legal environment, more cooperative politicians, and some would argue less hostile employers, but, more important than these, to the greater congruence between national and trade union values in the north than in the south. As Phelps Brown (1983:235) notes, in Canada "the atmosphere of social solidarity coming down from its conservative tradition might have been expected to let the trade unionist breathe more freely than he could south of the border." Or, as I put it recently, "American social structure and values foster an emphasis on competitive individualism, an orientation that is not congruent with class consciousness, support for socialist or social democratic parties, or a strong trade union movement." (Lipset, 1989, 1990:170). Various survey findings which deal with *underlying values*, sentiments bearing on collectivity orientation versus competitive individualism, the former consistently stronger in Canada, the latter more dominant south of the border, bolster the argument (Lipset,

1989, 1990:156-158). Canadians are more supportive of narrowing income differences, of approaching equality of result, while Americans put more emphasis on equal opportunity, or meritocratic competition. Conversely, reflecting the other side of the Tory-social democratic tradition, a number of comparative academic surveys indicate Canadians are more deferential than Americans to elites and institutions (Lipset, 1990:153-154).

It should be noted, however, as Gary Bowden and I have separately recorded, that when asked directly in recent years about feelings toward trade unions, "more Canadians than Americans view unions as too powerful; more Canadians than Americans perceive labor as the greatest threat; fewer Canadians than Americans have confidence in labor as an institution; more Canadians than Americans blame unions for inflation," and Americans are more likely to express approval of unions than Canadians (Bowden, 1989:735-739; Lipset, 1989, 1990:69). These findings appear to contradict the thesis that Canadian values are more supportive of trade unionism and class organization than American. The conundrum may result from the different national contexts within which the citizens of the two countries respond to such *specific issues*, i.e., not values. These attitudes may be a reaction to the fact that Canadian unionism has more power, is stronger than its southern compeer, much like even greater anti-union polling responses in Australia, whose labor organizations and the Labor Party are more important and stronger than those in Canada. They may also reflect antagonism by Canadians to the high strike rates in their country, which have been very much greater during the seventies and eighties than those recorded south of the border (International Labor Office, 1988:1048, 1050).

The greater direct hostility to unions north of the border may also reflect the closer link between the Canadian labor movement and a political party, the NDP, which has never secured more than 20 percent of the vote federally. The American trade unions, on the other hand, are less directly affiliated with a party, but are identified with the Democrats, who, though not in control of the presidency, dominate both houses of Congress and more state governments and lead the Republicans in party identifications. These national differences in popular support for the union supported parties may help to determine the cross-border variations in the popularity of unions. Opponents of the NDP may carry their rejection of the party over to their feelings about the political and power position of unions, at the same time that most "Canadians perceive unions as fulfilling a legitimate role within society" (Bowden, 1989:734).

Values and attitudes apart, the answer to the question why Canadian unions are so much greater in membership than American ones favored by many analysts (Bruce, 1988, 1989; Weiler, 1989; Bowden, 1989) is differences in the legal environment, the fact that Canadian labor legislation and labor relations boards are more favorable to unions than their equivalents in the United States. They contend that the divergence in the trends of union density in the two countries results in large part from the fact that, unlike the situation in the United States, federal and provincial union representation legislation in Canada has encouraged labor organization. Seemingly, American labor groups are handicapped by the need to win representation elections, often held months after the unions have submitted the requisite number of *authorization cards*, or *petitions*, signed by at least 30 percent of the employees. By the mid-1980s, unions were winning less than half (45 percent) of all such contests, down, it should be noted, from three-fifths in 1965, two-thirds in 1955, and three-quarters immediately after the war. In most of Canada, on the other hand, unions are certified on demonstrating that they have enrolled a majority, 50 to 60 percent depending on jurisdic-

tion, as *dues-paying members*. Where elections are required, as in British Columbia and Nova Scotia, they are almost invariably held within two weeks. Hence, Canadian employers have little or no opportunity to try to change their employees' pre-filing decision to join a union, while American companies can and often do conduct lengthy anti-union campaigns prior to the election. Comparative studies of employer and labor board behavior indicate that American employers have been much more disposed to engage in unfair labor practices than Canadians, in some part because "regulation of such practices has been markedly more effective in Canada" (Bruce, 1990; Weiler, 1983, 1984). Still, in spite of such enforcement, unions failed to win certifications through elections in approximately one-quarter of the cases in Nova Scotia between 1986 and 1988 and a fifth in British Columbia in 1988 (Nova Scotia Department of Labour, 1988:47; British Columbia Industrial Relations Council, 1988:62).

Although the main focus of the discussion on the effects of the legal procedures affecting certification has been on variations in North America, it should not be forgotten that European trade unions, most of which are invariably more successful than North American ones in recruiting members, operate without the sanction of certification by a government agency. As Derek Bok (1971:1126) emphasizes:

What is distinctive about our [North American] law is the active part it plays in regulating the process by which the union achieves recognition from the employer. In other countries...the laws create no formal machinery [certifying unions]. ...no provision has been made for representation elections, nor does the law require the selection of a union to serve as exclusive bargaining agent for any given group of employees.

The British experience, typical of that in Europe, assumes "that trade unions must be allowed to operate informally, in a legal vacuum. ...The unions of manual workers had very generally gained recognition by their ability to strike in the works of employers who refused it. ..." (Phelps Brown, 1983:215). And except for the British, European labor organizations also secure and hold members without contractual provisions, common on this continent, to require workers to join or remain in labor organizations. As Everett Kassalow (1980:328) notes, "formal arrangements, through collective bargaining (or other) arrangements to make union membership a condition of employment, are largely absent in continental Western Europe. Indeed, under a number of continental West European national constitutions, or in separate labor statutes, such compulsion is illegal."

Those who stress the importance of the differences in legal policies in accounting for cross-border variations in North America particularly emphasize the "rapid rise of public sector unionism in Canada," since state actions can benefit government unionism more than that in the private sector (Bowden, 1989:737; Troy, 1990a). But Meltz (1990:7) finds that "the long term trends ... [reveal a] virtually identical relationship between the rates of private service sector union density to that in all other sectors in both Canada and the United States ... around a mean of 21 percent" And he argues that the "stability of the relationship and its similarity in both countries ... suggests that the factors governing the overall relationship of union density between Canada and the United States apply equally" to the private and public sectors. This finding, I believe, lends substantial weight to my contention that the elements that differentiate and affect differences in union density between the two countries are not primarily structural, whether political or economic, that a large part of the answer lies in more sociological factors such as those I have stressed here.²

² For evidence relevant to a critique of the political and employer policy arguments, see Lipset (1986:427-438).

The argument that dissimilarities in public policy, or, as some argue, in employer behavior, are largely responsible for the cross-border variations in union density is also challenged by the finding that the minority of American workers who tell pollsters that they would vote for a union in a representation election is low and has been declining. The percent so indicating was 29 in a University of Michigan Survey Research Center study taken in 1977, down to 24 in a *Washington Post/ABC News* poll conducted in 1986. Such unwillingness to support unions in the respondents' workplace is presumably not affected by how labor legislation is written or enforced, or the ways American employers take advantage of these policies to defeat unions in representation elections. Rather, I contend, they reflect to some degree the refurbishment of free-market individualistic values over the post-war decades in the United States.

The fact that the legal environment is more union friendly while business is less aggressively anti-labor in Canada than in the United States only raises the conundrum one step further to the question why Canadian authorities, who have included many business related Conservative and Social Credit governments, are seemingly more supportive or permissive with respect to unions than American ones. British Columbia, which has been governed for all but three of the last 38 years by what must be close to the most ideologically right-wing, laissez-faire, and anti-union oriented government in North America, that of the Social Credit party, is second only to Newfoundland among Canada's ten provinces in union density (Meltz: 1989:149). Clearly, as John Calvert (1987:383) emphasizes, varying labor "laws do not fall from the sky; they reflect the prevailing norms and mores of the wider society." Or, as Bowden (1989:740) notes, "it can be plausibly argued that Canadian-American differences in labor law reflect differences in underlying values." The same may be said about corporate behavior. This argument may be expanded by reference to the comparative studies of the opinions of federal and provincial-state legislators and high-level civil servants in both countries taken in the seventies and eighties. These not only indicate that the Canadians are more supportive of statist-welfare (Tory-social democratic) policies than Americans, but that *Canadian Conservatives are more liberal on such issues than American Democrats*. There is a cross-border difference in the basic orientation of political elites, one which may show up, not only in income redistribution policies, but with labor union rights as well.³

All the factors reflecting different political cultures and national values are interrelated. They may help to account for the results of the one limited cross-national comparison of the attitudes among non-unionists toward joining trade unions. "[T]here is at least one striking difference between the two countries. Specifically, there appears to be a higher level of latent unionism in Canada as measured by willingness of non-unionists to take out union membership" (Krahn and Lowe, 1984:160-161).

Finally, I would like to address one hypothesis about which I feel *very uncertain*, the varying motivation of union organizers in the two countries. In looking over the American experience, it is noteworthy that the decline began at the time of the merger of the AF of L and CIO in 1955. Dual unionism has always been anathema to American unionism, and the assumption at the time was that unification would strengthen the movement. It did not. It may be argued that the merger reduced an important competitive element which had motivated union officials in their organizing drives, to beat out their competitors (Freeman, 1989:40-41). Some more recent American data which fit the assumption is the strength of teacher unionism, the NEA and the AFT, which together comprise close to three million

³ For a discussion and reference to the literature, see Lipset (1989, 1990:140-141).

members, and which have grown greatly during the period in which unionism was declining. If you know these two groups, you know that there is nothing each likes better than to beat the other in organizing new areas or to take representation away from the other.

This explanation would seem to be confounded by the Canadian record, since the federations also merged north of the border. There is more dual competitive unionism in Canada, national versus international unions, and competitive Quebec organizations (Meltz, 1985:327-328). But these aspects should not be exaggerated. I would, however, suggest that the greater retention of movement ideology, reflected in the socialist political orientation of many Canadian unionists, has had some effect in motivating Canadian union leaders to try harder, to see organizing workers more in cause terms than their American compeers do. My impressionistic "evidence" to this effect is based on very limited unrepresentative cross-border contacts. I would note a somewhat similar argument by Donald Swartz (1989), who points out that from the seventies on Canadian unions have been more militant, less inclined to make concessions, than those in the United States. His assumption is sustained by the cross-border variation in strike rates. As noted earlier, since the sixties, the Canadian has been consistently much higher than the American. Swartz emphasizes that a major reason for Canadian unions splitting away "from their American parents" in recent years is the "divergence over fundamental trade union principles." It is the greater capacity for struggle in the north compared to a willingness to compromise in the south that "underlies the expansion of the Canadian labour movement over the past two decades" and the decline in the American. There is clearly need for research on these observations. They add other ways in which the factors which have favored a Canadian socialist movement may also contribute to greater trade union strength. At the moment, however, these are speculations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would reiterate the suggestion that American political exceptionalism, the absence of a socialist party, is related to trade union exceptionalism, the weakest union movement in the democratic developed world in terms of density, and one of the least militant as reflected in comparative strike rates. But Canadian social democracy and unions, though much stronger and more militant than the American, have not done as well as their brethren in the developed Commonwealth or most of Europe. An answer to this pattern is contained in Louis Hartz' suggestion that Canada is more like the United States than the industrialized countries across the oceans, that it is not as Tory, not as class conscious, while it is more classically liberal than these other nations. That is, as compared to Australasia, Britain and Europe, Canada is more Whig, less welfare oriented; as contrasted to the United States, it is more group-oriented, more statist, more communitarian. Hence it has more socialism and trade unionism than its neighbor, but less than exist in most other economically advanced societies.

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