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Explaining Local Unions' Responses to Globalization
Pour comprendre la réaction des syndicats locaux à la mondialisation
Explicando las respuestas de los sindicatos locales frente a la globalización

Janice R. Foley

Article abstract

Twenty-two private sector trade union locals in the manufacturing, service and technology sectors in Canada were surveyed by telephone in 2002/2003. The objective was to determine union locals' understanding of the impact globalization was having on their operations, and to identify the contextual factors affecting their responses. The data were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. The locals associated globalization with plant closures, reduced production, and the elimination of or transfer of jobs and equipment out of the country. Seventeen of the locals reported being affected to a moderate to high degree. Their main responses were lobbying, educating members and the public, and organizing. The important contextual factors identified included local size, industry sector, levels of support available to and accessed by the locals, and the perceived need for and ability to adapt successfully to change.

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According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), unions perform three significant functions in industrial relations. They ensure that workers have a say in their working life and get a fair return for their efforts. They also help to eradicate poverty, social exclusion, social tension and unrest, all of which threaten social stability (ILO, 1997). The growth in income inequality and the incidence of poverty, documented by the World Bank (World Bank, 2000), has been attributed to the overall reduction in trade union power (Leisink, 1999). The ILO report concluded that "union organizations play an important role in industrial relations" (ILO, 1997: 27).

Nonetheless, there are many indications that unions are not faring well in an environment dominated by a free market ideology, where capital is

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able to move around the globe with few restrictions, and global competition necessitates cost-cutting and high productivity. The ILO reported that in the past ten years, union membership had declined in over half of the 70 countries for which data were available. While that study found that union density had stayed relatively constant in Canada, more recent data indicates that it declined by 7% between 1984 and 1998 (Riddell and Riddell, 2003).

Despite its positive view of unions' role in contemporary society, the ILO expressed concerns about the future of organized labour, given the increasing numbers of workers who currently fell outside its boundaries, the diversity of interests found within its boundaries, and inflexible union structures. An additional problem highlighted was the inadequacy of existing transnational ties that prevented the labour movement from responding effectively to the global challenges being faced. It raised the question, "Considering that the unions are no longer really representative, is it not in fact for Parliament, as the emanation of the will of the people, to address such basic issues?" (ILO, 1997: 23).

This study examines how a number of Canadian union locals are actually responding to the global pressures they are facing. It builds upon an earlier Canadian survey of national and international labour organizations that sought information about how unions were responding to workplace change (Kumar, Murray and Schetagne, 1999). It extends that study by providing more contextually rich information regarding locals' rationales for their responses, and for the outcomes that have materialized.

The structure of this paper is as follows. The next sections briefly examine the literature defining globalization, the strategies recommended for addressing global challenges, and the empirical evidence regarding the extent to which these strategies are being pursued currently. The following sections set out the research methodology and present findings regarding how contextual factors affect locals' adaptation to globalization. A discussion with recommendations for future research concludes the article.

DEFINING GLOBALIZATION

Globalization has been defined narrowly as "the growth of transnational business investments and trade" (Nissen, 2002a), or more broadly, as "the worldwide expansion of product and capital markets, the negotiation of free-trade agreements and the ascendance of market ideology that has reduced government involvement in the regulation of domestic economies" (Chaykowski and Giles, 1998). Waddington (1999) notes that there are three generally-accepted features of globalization: the internationalization of financial capital, the global diffusion of technology and the rise in

cultural exchange. Three other features that are frequently associated with globalization are the intensification of international trade, the growth of multinational corporations, and the perhaps declining influence of domestic governments.

Many authors have pointed out that globalization will not affect all business organizations or unions the same way. The production and regulatory regimes (Waddington, 1999), the ownership and export-orientation of companies (Murray et al., 1999), and the strategies employed by labour and management will all affect outcomes.

Nonetheless, globalization has had some negative consequences overall for organized labour. It has resulted in the loss of high-paid manufacturing jobs, historically a substantial source of union revenues. The neoliberal ideology that sustains it has eroded social safety nets and contributed to domestic unemployment, which has weakened labour's bargaining power (Leisink, 1999; McKenna, 2000; Waddington, 1999). As labour has weakened, employers have been able to negotiate concessions on wages and working conditions in exchange for job protection.

ADDRESSING GLOBALIZATION

Many recommendations have been made about how unions should respond to globalization. Waddington (1999) suggests that union responses must occur at the local, national and international levels. At the local level, organizing the service sector to maintain union density is seen as a priority because service sector jobs are the fastest-growing occupations in the developed countries (Clawson, 2003). Electing strong local leaders who can convince the membership to mobilize to respond to global threats, and that success is possible, is seen as another priority. Membership educational programs are seen as essential to this endeavour. Leaders should also be dedicated to creating union structures that facilitate mobilization by promoting internal democracy and member participation (Murray et al., 1999) that will allow leaders to identify common worker concerns and frame them as injustices that can and should be eradicated (Vilrokz, 1999).

To make political action more effective, it is believed that developing strong community ties would overcome labour's image as a self-interest group, which would in turn promote higher levels of public support for unions. Furthermore, many researchers believe that unions must adopt an agenda for social change that will be beneficial to all workers, unionized or not. Johnston (2002) points out that unions must confront the very different circumstances workers within the local community face in terms of employment security, wages, and benefits.

A final bit of advice offered is that unions should perhaps contemplate cooperating with management in order to secure better worker protections. One suggestion is that unions could help employers implement workplace change, on the condition that they have greater say in how that implementation occurs (Frenkel and Royal, 1999). But that advice is, itself, contentious. Many scholars have warned that it is important for unions to formulate their own bargaining agendas on workplace change, and maintain their independence in negotiating with employers. Nissen (2002b) suggests that unions should only consider partnering with employers once social movement unionism has proven to be ineffectual.

Beyond the local level, it is felt that ties with other unions and with central labour bodies must be strengthened if globalization is to be fought successfully (Olney, 1996). It is recommended that unions work together within countries (1) to prevent workers from different regions of the country from competing with one another, (2) to utilize limited resources most economically, (3) to share information, and (4) to ensure their demands for change are taken seriously (Murray et al., 1999; Waddington, 1999). It has been proposed that central labour organizations could take a lead role in setting labour's national agenda, assist with the coordination of efforts across unions, and provide support and services to the labour movement as required. Tight linkages between parent and local unions could ensure local efforts are coordinated, and that locals have the financial support and expertise required to implement their strategies. It is believed, however, that locals must retain autonomy to pursue their own agendas, building upon their individual strengths and community ties.

While local and national efforts are required, they are not sufficient. International efforts are required because one of the most potent threats to the labour movement is the loss of jobs to countries with lower cost structures due to lack of regulation or inadequate enforcement of labour, health, safety and environmental standards. Part of the mandate of social movement unionism is to improve the lot of workers in third world countries, which requires the negotiation of minimum worker and environmental protections into free trade agreements in all countries. It has been noted that achieving minimum labour standards will require international labour solidarity and the support of social movement groups. Successfully negotiating international labour standards would give organized labour in the developed countries some power over multinationals by reducing the financial pay-offs associated with transferring jobs to third world countries. It would also reduce employers' ability to threaten workers with job loss if they are too intransigent at the bargaining table.

Herod (2001) maintains that workers can shape "the landscapes of capital" at the national, regional or local level, depending on where

organizational weak spots exist. Going on strike, refusing to work overtime, developing media campaigns, negotiating national contracts, and building solidarity within and across national boundaries, are all potentially effective strategies. He warns however that union structures must be flexible enough to allow action to take place at multiple levels. Waddington (1999) adds that in the case of multinationals, being able to take even one supplier out of action can seriously disrupt operations. Both Herod (2001) and Murray and associates (Murray et al., 1999) identify power as a major requirement for successful adaptation to global pressures.

To summarize, according to the literature, in order to successfully adapt to globalization, unions are urged to: (1) organize in new sectors, (2) forge ties within and across Canadian unions, with central labour bodies and with unions abroad, (3) increase the potential for membership mobilization to achieve change by addressing internal union structures, engaging in membership consciousness-raising, and developing community ties, locally, nationally and internationally, (4) commit to social unionism, (5) cooperate with employers' workplace change initiatives or adopt an independent agenda on workplace change. In the next section, the empirical evidence regarding the degree to which organized labour has adapted in these ways will be examined.

ORGANIZED LABOUR'S ADAPTATION TO CHANGING CIRCUMSTANCES

Much of the literature has mentioned that Canadian unions have introduced many changes over the past 20 years, including prioritizing organizing and, more recently, developing explicit agendas in regard to workplace change. But a 1997 HRDC survey of 99 national and international unions in Canada (Kumar, Murray and Schetagne, 1998, 1999) found that only 34 of the 99 respondents had a workplace change agenda. A bare majority reported that organizing was very important, and only 36% were organizing outside their traditional jurisdictions.

The growing number of workers in precarious employment situations (ILO, 1997: 23) would benefit from unionization, but the empirical evidence confirms that organizing success has been on the decline since the mid-1970s (Katz-Rosene, 2003). It is not clear whether this lack of success should be attributed to a lack of effort. It may simply be that organizing is becoming more difficult in all sectors, but particularly in the service sector where many of the jobs are precarious. Increasingly inhospitable regulatory regime for unions in several provinces have undoubtedly contributed to organizing difficulties, as have intransigent employers determined to keep

their workplaces union-free. Murray (2002: 127) has commented that to even maintain membership numbers, "unions appear to have to run faster and faster."

Although the literature urges unions to cooperate with one another to use their resources more efficiently and achieve economies of scale (Olney, 1996), this does not appear to be happening to any great extent. The fragmentation in the Canadian labour movement that has arisen from bitter jurisdictional and other disputes among unions have made cooperation difficult. There are also serious disagreements over whether the best way to secure economic and social change is via backing a particular federal political party or focusing on community-based partnerships. Pressures toward enterprise unionism, which isolate locals from one another, from their parent unions and from the labour movement, have also become more intense as global competition has increased (Murray et al., 1999). All this has seriously affected the Canadian Labour Congress' ability to present a unified alternative vision of the future on behalf of the labour movement, and to coordinate national and international efforts to achieve it (Robinson, 2002).

There are also indications that the internal structures of Canadian unions may not be conducive to successful mobilization. They have not been very amenable to change even as union membership profiles have expanded to include women, visible minorities, peripheral and professional workers. Several writers have commented on the inadequacy of existing representation structures which allow white male leaders and aging, white male members to control union agendas (Fairbrother and Yates, 2003; Frost, 2000; Kumar and Murray, 2003; Olney, 1996). Observers have noted an unwillingness on the part of some leaders to allow members to collectively determine union objectives and to share meaningfully in the decision-making process (Hurd, Milkman and Turner, 2003; Schenk, 2003). Schenk, in particular, notes that activism that is directed by leaders is more common than activism that arises from members' concerns.

As far as social unionism is concerned, the 1997 HRDC survey indicated that Canadians are committed to it, and that larger unions are more likely to be interested in encouraging activism, organizing political action, and forming alliances nationally and internationally. Overall, 71% of respondents believed that member activism was very important, and 54% supported engaging in political action to change public policy. But other aspects of social unionism, such as building coalitions with other unions in Canada and with community groups, and forming international alliances with unions, were considered very important by only 45% and 22% of respondents respectively, whereas 96% reported that protecting wages and benefits was a top organizational priority.

Other top priorities identified included increasing wages and benefits, protecting members from the negative effects of workplace change, and regulating the work environment, all of which provide some evidence that bread and butter issues continue to dominate the bargaining agenda. While these are unarguably important issues for all workers, less than one-quarter of respondents put policies that might be particularly attractive to non-traditional members, such as anti-harassment, employment equity, family leave, flex time and childcare policies, into the "high importance" category. Also, almost half of them indicated that they had achieved low levels of success in achieving these objectives, while the success rate on the more traditional items was high or moderate. This possibly indicates the truth of what many female union activists have long averred, that their goals are the first to be removed from the bargaining agenda (Briskin and McDermott, 1993; Cobble, 1993).

A follow-up questionnaire in 2000/2001, distributed to 205 national and international unions in Canada with more than 500 members, revealed that few changes had occurred in three years in regard to organizational and bargaining priorities (Kumar and Murray, 2001, 2002). The main differences noted from the 1997 survey were that activism and organizing had become somewhat more important, but there was still a reluctance to organize outside traditional areas. Organizing in the private service sector was particularly problematic, with the researchers reporting that "the extent of organizing . . . does not reflect the huge concentration of non-unionized workplaces in this sector" (Kumar and Murray, 2002: 5).

This review of the empirical evidence suggests that there is good reason to question the ability of organized labour to change sufficiently to overcome the challenges globalization is posing for them. This paper will examine what is being done in 22 private sector local unions to adapt to global pressures, and the rationales underlying these actions. The methodology for this study is described in the next section.

METHODOLOGY

This study is based on data collected from 22 private sector union locals in the manufacturing, service and technology fields during the fall/winter of 2002/3. The justification for choosing large private sector locals was that previous research had indicated that large, private sector unions were most likely to be proactive in trying to protect workers (Kumar, Murray and Schetagne, 1999). It was therefore reasonable to assume they might also be doing the most to respond to global pressures. Similarly, it was expected that unions most likely to be affected by globalization, those with members in exporting or foreign-owned firms (Murray et al., 1999),

would be most likely to be responding. This suggested the sample should be drawn from the manufacturing, service and technology sectors. Finally, it was considered desirable to do this study at the local level because of the dearth of available information about what Canadian union locals really do at the strategic level. In addition, the literature has mentioned that due to the diversity found across locals, specific responses can only be elicited from local spokespersons (Kumar, Murray and Schetagne, 1999).

Consequently, The Directory of Labour Organizations in Canada (Workplace Information Directorate, 1998) was used to identify all unions involved in the manufacturing, service and technology sectors. National union spokespersons were contacted to request referrals to contact persons within the unions' locals who would be best able to discuss any challenges the local was facing as a result of globalization. During these initial contacts, globalization was defined in terms of its effects, for instance, the loss of jobs to foreign competitors, increased foreign competition, free trade agreements resulting in deregulation, privatization, and so on.

The largest unions were the first to be contacted and they typically identified more than one local that might be suitable for this study. Referrals were sometimes made to a national or regional representative or to a provincial body, but most of them were to individual local informants, predominantly local presidents or other elected officials. Several business agents, staff representatives, an organizer and an education officer were also identified as most knowledgeable about the impact of globalization on the local.

All referees were contacted and asked to participate in telephone interviews that would take place at a time convenient for them. In general, the reaction to the study was positive, with the main reason for refusal to participate being that globalization was not a big issue in that local, or that nothing specifically was being done to address it. Nonetheless, it was difficult to identify the appropriate respondents for this study, and then to reach them and secure their consent to participate. Ultimately, about 40 locals in 12 unions (see Table 1 for a list of the unions represented) were contacted and 28 interviews were arranged, 22 with representatives of private sector locals. This paper is based on those 22 interviews.

The locals ranged in size from 50 to 26,000 members. Thirteen of the locals had fewer than 2500 members, while 2 had over 15,000 members. Eighteen were affiliated with an international union. Six were in the manufacturing sector, 9 were in the service sector, and the rest had memberships that spanned several sectors. The industry sectors represented included steel, energy, telecommunications, automotive, grocery, dairy, agriculture, lumber, meat-packing, construction, transportation, private health care, hotels, and clothing.

TABLE 1

Unions Represented in this Study

National Unions	National Automobile, Aerospace, Transportation and General Workers Union of Canada (CAW)
	Industrial Wood and Allied Workers of Canada
	Grain Services Union
International Unions	United Food and Commercial Workers
	United Steelworkers of America
	International Brotherhood of Teamsters
	Office and Professional Employees International Union
	Labourers' International Union of North America
	International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers
	International Association of Operating Engineers
	Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union
	United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipe Fitting Industry of the United States and Canada

The interviews normally took place during regular business hours and lasted from 20 to 60 minutes. Because the interviews were to be administered by telephone, the questions were quite structured. Respondents were given the questions in advance (see Table 2), and had ample opportunities during the interviews to clarify the questions and to elaborate on their answers. The questions addressed how the locals were being affected by globalization, what they were doing about it and why, what the outcomes of their actions had been, and whether they found these outcomes satisfactory. Respondents were also asked to comment on the utility for their particular locals of a number of strategies being used by labour organizations around the world to combat globalization. Finally, demographic data were collected.

The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were coded where possible to generate descriptive statistics using SPSS. A separate analysis was done for the 13 locals with fewer than 2500 members. The transcripts were also analyzed qualitatively with the assistance of The Ethnograph 5.0 (Qualis Research, 1998), a software program designed to facilitate the analysis of qualitative data. Statistics regarding the frequency of the appearance of the code words were generated to help identify dominant themes. Transcript sections associated with each of the code words, identified by speaker, were printed out to aid analysis.

TABLE 2

Questionnaire for Telephone Interview

Objectives	To document local union efforts to respond to the new economy and identify contextual facts impacting on their successes. Focus on large, private sector locals in manufacturing, technology and service.
Questions	1. To what extent is your local being affected by globalization? (high, medium or low). Explain.
	2. How is your local being affected? Positively or negatively?
	3. How are you responding? What are your objectives in responding this way?
	4. Why did you choose the strategies that you are currently employing?
	5. How effective has this response been? Explain.
	6. What assistance, if any, are you getting from the national/ international labour movement to help you respond effectively to global pressures? Explain.
	7. Would any of the following strategies being used by labour organizations in other countries be helpful to your local, in terms of being better able to adapt to global pressures? Why or why not?
	Provisions of new services.
	Recruitment of new members such as women, youth, peripheral employees or minorities.
	Forging new alliances.
	The expansion of international trade union cooperation.
	Persuading Government to reduce external competitive pressures through higher trade barriers.
	Persuade the Government to pursue high employment policies.
	Persuade to restrict the mobility of capital to make it more difficult to relocate to low labour cost countries.
	Raise the cost of doing business in other nations through international organizing, international labour standards and multinational bargaining campaigns.
	Organize labour nationally through networks within multi-national corporations.
	Adopt "new social unionism" vision of how unions can at once become more internationalist, democratic and relevant to the contemporary world.
	8. Have you any plans to modify your current strategies in the near future? If so what changes do you contemplate? Why would you introduce these changes?
	9. How confident are you that unions will be able to remain effective despite global pressures? Explain.
Demographics	International/national affiliation and total membership.
	Size of local presently, size of local two years ago and size of local five years ago.
	Breakdown of membership by gender/minorities.
	Average seniority within the local.
	Average wage in the local.

FINDINGS

The findings will be reported under 3 headings: (1) magnitude and direction of impact of globalization; (2) typical responses; and (3) contextual factors affecting responses. Where the responses of the locals with fewer than 2500 members differed from those of the overall sample, these results are reported separately.

Magnitude and Direction of Impact of Globalization

Although almost as many locals had increased their memberships (n = 9) as had lost members over the past 5 years (n = 10), respondents' comments indicated that the main challenges associated with globalization were plant closures, reduced production or the introduction of technology that had eliminated jobs at home, and the transfer of jobs out of the country. While an occasional comment was made that globalization had increased foreign markets for Canadian products or created jobs for Canadian workers, 13 locals reported that globalization had had a negative impact, while the rest indicated that both positive and negative outcomes had materialized. Eight of the 13 small locals reported that globalization had affected them negatively, a slightly higher proportion than for locals overall. One of the larger locals reported that globalization had had a generally positive impact.

Many respondents felt that employers were utilizing the threat of relocation to gain an advantage at the bargaining table: "anytime you go to negotiate you get to hear about the sunshine states and Mexico, and that is where the work could go if we don't play the game right." Canada's inability to compete with countries that had lax environmental, labour and safety standards was mentioned several times. The relocation threat also pertained to work distribution in Canada. "They used a bargaining tactic of threatening to move the work out of British Columbia to . . . New Brunswick where the average pay rate is . . . significantly lower." Respondents pointed out that provinces, cities and municipalities would undercut one another in order to attract jobs: "it's not just province-to-province, sometimes it's one municipality competing against another municipality or city for jobs." Overall, the relocation threat posed the greatest challenge to unions because it affected their ability to negotiate good collective agreements.

Respondents felt that the best way to protect Canadian workers from competition with each other and from third world countries was to do more organizing and ensure that international standards for worker and environmental protection were established in all countries that were party to international trade agreements. However, they felt unable to effect the

necessary changes to the legislative environment when governments were clearly siding with business rather than with workers. "[W]e can't get legislation passed, we can't do this, we can't do that, but big business has very little problem." They cited the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) as one indicator of the Canadian government's indifference to workers' and citizens' wellbeing.

> We're seeing layoffs . . . plant closures, bankruptcies, and that obviously has a trickle-down effect because now that becomes a drain on the social services. Somebody who's just lost their job is either going to be collecting welfare or they're going to be collecting employment insurance benefits, so that directly impacts the taxpayers. You no longer have that income going into the community, buying homes, buying cars, buying furniture.

The anti-union legislation being introduced in some jurisdictions was seen as a further indication of governments' lack of support for unions and workers.

Typical Responses to Globalization

In light of the challenges the locals associated with globalization, the typical intent behind their responses was job protection. Protecting wages and working conditions, and continuing to provide an acceptable level of service to members, were also seen as necessary to facilitate their organizing efforts and stabilize membership levels. The locals were almost evenly split in terms of whether or not they were responding proactively or reactively to the challenges they were facing. Lobbying the government was their preferred way to achieve their goals (n = 10), followed by doing nothing (n = 4), then educating either their members or the public (n = 3). Smaller locals had a greater propensity to educate their members and/or the public than did the larger locals. Research and activism were mentioned infrequently, and only by the larger locals. The main rationale supplied for the use of these particular strategies was that they were best-suited to the locals' individual circumstances (n = 8). But four locals each reported that their actions had been dictated by tradition, by what had worked before, or by their parent unions.

Respondents' comments confirmed the importance to the locals of education and alliance-formation with other locals and/or unions, as well as organizing. Forming alliances to lobby the government for new legislation domestically and internationally was seen as one of the few options available to protect jobs and Canadian standards "our response can only be political." Lobbying was done in conjunction with other groups because, "[t]he more groups you work with, the more coalitions you form . . . the better access you have to reach more people and to gain more support and get more people

involved in the process." Alliance formation also facilitated information-sharing, which was considered very important. "If I had a question about a British utility that looked like they were sniffing around here, I have called that person and said . . . tell me about them." Four locals mentioned forming an alliance with community groups to improve their image and become more effective. One respondent indicated, "We created . . . a citizen's group from a broad base, basically to react against being stereotyped as just a union looking out for its membership . . . to get a wider buy-in to the public." Another mentioned, "we start or are part of many coalitions that work in communities because [combating globalization] doesn't start at the top . . . it starts at the bottom, at the community base."

Public education was provided in regard to businesses' responsibilities to their employees and their communities, corporate wrongdoing, and the downsides of international trade agreements. Respondents believed that exposing corporate greed and how corporations were manipulating governments would cause a public uproar that would force businesses and government to be more socially responsible. "[I]f the public understands the issue and if you get the public on your side of the issue, then clearly the government has to react or they will suffer the consequences." Membership education was provided to ensure that the members would support local lobbying efforts by signing petitions, rallying, supporting strike action, contributing to special action funds, and the like, as well as to ensure that the membership was properly informed about global issues. In some cases, special education programs were set up to overcome member indifference. "We have held classes on globalization and what these trade deals really mean."

Membership training was also a priority in locals that saw skills training as a strategic necessity. "If our members can do that work it will preclude others doing it." Training in "literacy, numeracy, document skills, computer skills, thinking and problem-solving skills, people skills" was also provided to help members adjust to the changing work environment and improve their employability. Respondents noted that much of this training related to soft skills that could be used anywhere.

Organizing was the final major strategy reported. Locals indicated they were interested in finding new ways to organize workers, domestically and internationally, because "whatever we have been doing in the past hasn't been as effective as it should have been, and I think that is reflected in the levels of unionization and how they have dropped." Non-union competitors, women, minorities, aboriginal workers, youth and older workers had been targeted, but seemingly little progress had been made. The average proportion of female members across the locals in the sample was less than

one-third, and only 11 of the locals could estimate the proportion of their memberships that were minority groups members.

Despite an almost universally expressed willingness to organize domestically, some locals mentioned that the membership structure resulted from the employers' hiring decisions, over which they had no influence. One of the representatives of the construction locals pointed out that unless there was work to be done, there was little point in organizing. Respondents also indicated that organizing was difficult when many employers were strongly anti-union. One reported that it had taken him over a year to organize a plant because "these guys are . . . profoundly hard ass." Organizing outside their traditional jurisdictions was rarely mentioned, but some locals thought that national organizing might be helpful.

There was also a compulsion in some locals to organize across borders because, "[we] need to develop some international solidarity so that workers aren't pitted against workers." Five locals indicated that they were doing international organizing, but many others found it daunting. The "absolutely obscene amount of wealth [multinational corporations] have accumulated and their ability to buy things and move plants" and the locals' inability to get a level playing field, were considered huge obstacles. An even more basic problem was that, because of differing legislative regimes in some of the third world countries, the fight was different. "they don't have the freedom to organize, they don't have the laws and the infrastructure to support them to organize workers."

Having now reviewed the locals' typical responses to global pressures and the rationales given for them, the contextual factors affecting local responses will be identified.

Contextual Factors Affecting Local Responses

The findings reported above indicate that local size was a factor affecting some aspects of local responses to globalization. Respondents noted that smaller locals might be somewhat at a disadvantage when it came to being aware of how other unions were addressing global challenges. One reason was that they might not be able to afford to send delegates to conferences, or to belong to professional organizations where information was exchanged. Even if they had the information, they were less likely to have the resources to initiate any action on their own. As one respondent commented, "It's difficult to focus . . . broadly when your resources are as limited as they are." There was also some suggestion that they might find it more difficult to gain access to federal and provincial politicians, or to assistance from their parent unions. "We always have excellent [resources

and support] because of our size; we're the third biggest local . . . the biggest one in Canada."

A second important contextual factor was that not all locals were affected negatively by globalization, so the degree to which they were, and whether the impact was positive or negative, were important contextual factors. Many of the respondents indicated that it was business as usual since little was changing "hugely" in their estimation, "you go about your business, you organize new workplaces, and you negotiate as you see fit." But industry sector affected the extent to which the locals were experiencing negative effects of globalization.

According to respondents' comments, all manufacturing locals and those in the steel, meat-packing, utility, lumber and agricultural sectors were the hardest hit. These were the sectors that had been mainly affected by international trade agreements that had eliminated jobs and markets. The increasing technological sophistication of production processes in these sectors had also had a major impact: "we are producing more . . . today [with less than 200 people] that we were back when we had 1500 people." One respondent mentioned that new technology had been exported to a third world country, eliminating jobs within the local. "Our newest rolling mill went to Brazil . . . which had resulting job loss, too." The service sector, on the other hand, was virtually unaffected. "The service sector first of all is retail . . . it is very difficult to move a grocery store to Minot."

It was also apparent that the supports the locals had access to and utilized mitigated some of the negative impacts of globalization, so this must be considered another important contextual factor. Parent unions were a major source of assistance to the locals. One that had suffered huge membership losses stated that the parent union's most critical role had been, "insuring that as our members were laid off and plants closed, that the best possible agreements were negotiated in addition to what was already provided for in our contract." Support was available from other locals and other unions if the local officers were inclined to seek it out. Therefore the attitudes of local leaders toward collaboration can be considered another important contextual factor.

Collaboration was not universally appealing, although collaboration on the domestic front was seemingly more acceptable than international collaboration. In some cases, it was deemed unnecessary. "[W]e never really went outside the [union] looking for a lot of assistance . . . we took the bull by the horns ourselves." In others it was difficult, due to poor relationships between unions as a result of previous and ongoing jurisdictional and other disputes. "[Unions] often fail to want to work together which . . . one would think that would be uncharacteristic for a union, but it's not."

Even those respondents who favoured better cooperation and resource-sharing between unions felt constrained by resource limitations. "[W]hen it comes to organizing against globalization and properly funding various communication efforts, there's been a lot of talk. These things just often don't happen for one reason or another, usually to do with money." Some locals also dismissed international cooperation as impractical because "the strongest labour movement is right here in North America."

Four locals mentioned that collaborating with employers made it easier to get support for their initiatives, but there was no consensus on this point. One participant commented,

> we have actually changed our strategies . . . they used to be . . . confrontation with the employers . . . [now] we don't just approach them with a problem, we approach them with a problem and a solution and it makes it a little easier to get what you want or what you need.

But another mentioned that his local had been accused of being "anti-union" because it had abandoned rigid work rules that were believed to impede competitiveness and ultimately hurt union members. "I think that we have to recognize that practices like that cause businesses to fail. . . . If they are not competitive and they are forced to lay people off and go to contract services, I don't think that we are serving our members' interests well." So there were varying degrees of willingness to take advantage of the supports available within the labour movement and from employers to mitigate the effects of globalization.

Another contextual factor of importance, since pragmatism often drove local response, was to consider to what extent any kind of change was deemed critical by leaders and members, given that it would be extremely difficult to implement "it's just hard to make radical change quickly . . . we are dealing with guys that have been doing things the same way for a long time. . . . we have to break a pattern that is over 112 years old." Pragmatism dictated developing solutions suitable to local circumstances, but repeating what had worked in the past or adhering to union traditions negated the need to change. Following the directions of a parent union in order to access resources was another pragmatic response that might or might not necessitate change.

Locals sometimes opted to continue to pursue bread and butter issues as their first priority because "it still comes down to . . . [a]re you doing a good job representing the members . . . [a]re members happy with the kind of response they're getting to grievances and arbitrations and work-place issues." Changing their priorities required reconciling their "legal responsibilities as collective bargaining agent [with building and mobiliz-ing] a mass movement for greater social change." They sometimes felt that

tackling big issues such as globalization was the responsibility of other groups, often their parent union, or central labour organizations like the Canadian Labour Congress.

Other locals felt that change was necessary: "we need to move out into the global community to effect change worldwide if we want to ensure our own survivability." Unfortunately, if they tried to adopt a more global perspective, they sometimes faced opposition from members unwilling to place the bigger issues ahead of their own wellbeing. Therefore, what the membership wanted often determined local response. "It came down to what we felt our members wanted or were prepared to do in terms of the level of fight back." One respondent commented that, "memberships often have to get pretty badly beaten up before they actually respond strongly and make a sustained effort . . . to be effective." Parent unions sometimes withheld resources unless the locals did what the membership wanted, which strengthened the tendency to let membership wishes prevail. "[T]he national was prepared to support whatever action we chose to take, regardless of how militant, but of course, such actions had to be initiated locally and supported by the members . . . not a 'top down' solution."

So while it was not always clear to the locals whether or not their best, pragmatic response should involve change, at least one local that had suffered greatly because of globalization had opted for a local orientation. The respondent commented, "we need to focus on our own situation here and we need to work with other unions domestically to help them create the pressures that are necessary to make change in Canada."

The final contextual factor revealed in this study was the local's perceived ability to change and be effective. Although only three of the locals, including one of the smaller ones, felt that they had responded highly effectively to global pressures, another 14 felt that they had been at least somewhat effective. When successes were mentioned, they included being able to delay layoffs, find new jobs for laid-off workers, and increase the general employability of their members, and thus, their job security. In a few cases, locals had been able to influence the actions of governments and employers to back-track on decisions that would have imposed hardship on workers and communities.

The crosstabs analysis supplemented these findings, suggesting that the locals' ability to deal successfully with global pressures affected their proactivity, their willingness to try new strategies and their faith in the future of unions. Locals that felt great optimism were more confident that the strategies they were currently employing were the right ones. They were almost 100% in favour of providing new membership services, recruiting in new areas, forming alliances, encouraging the government to maintain

high employment policies, leveling the international playing field, national organizing, and social unionism.

On the other hand, frustration and worry were evident in the comments made by some of the other locals. "How do you change government . . . the deals that have been made . . . [H]ow can we as a union negotiate a good agreement, wages, benefits and pensions in [this] climate?" One of the more pessimistic comments was, "It's hard to be optimistic regarding the union or the labour movement's ability to influence [government indifference to the types of losses unions are experiencing]." It appeared that locals grew despondent when they perceived that, although they were losing their fight against globalization, there was little they could do about it because "we don't have the authority."

It is noteworthy that not one of the three locals that reported being very ineffectual in dealing with globalization intended to change strategies in the future, while another 6 reported no intention to change despite the fact that only 2 of them felt they had been highly effective in tackling globalization. Also, less than half of the locals who reported being negatively affected by globalization intended to change their current tactics and at least one local had abandoned the fight. "We are resigned to our fate." But further analysis showed that although 13 locals reported having been negatively affected by globalization, membership numbers had risen over the past 5 years for 6 of them, while another had experienced no real change. Furthermore, while 12 of the 13 locals admitted to being only somewhat effective in their responses, membership numbers had grown or stayed constant for all but 4 of them. The strong membership numbers might partially explain the lack of intention to change tactics.

Overall, the transcripts showed that while several of the locals felt some concerns, 90% of them believed that ultimately unions would prevail. A typical response in regard to the future of unions was, "Unions are still the most effective tool working people have worldwide to raise all working, health and safety, environmental and social conditions." Some respondents even believed that the pressures facing employees today created unique opportunities for unions. "I think that the more pressure that employees come under, the more relevant unions become." They were under no illusions that it would be easy to reverse the failing fortunes of the labour movement: "it's going to be a tough battle because a lot of folks out there would love to see us gone because we're probably one of the more vocal organized forces opposing some of the ideas that are out there." But they were determined to try and were absolutely sure they would succeed because they believed unions were "the last, best hope for the wage and salary earner" and "as long as there are workers who are getting exploited, they'll need unions."

DISCUSSION

The locals involved in this study were in the industry sectors most affected by globalization, and the respondents were named as the ones best qualified to discuss how its effects were being felt and addressed. Despite the fact that 17 of the 22 locals had been affected to at least a moderate degree by globalization and almost half of them had lost members, there was an overwhelming, although not unanimous, feeling that unions would be able to meet the challenges they faced.

Curiously though, although more than half of the locals had been negatively affected, only 10 locals in the total sample were reacting proactively, and only 13 intended to operate differently in the near future than had been the case in the past. This raises some questions about the basis for their strong belief in the future of the labour movement. While some of them could justify their decisions to stay the course because their outcomes had been positive, many could not. Of particular concern was the finding that three of the locals appeared to have totally given up on doing anything to improve the effectiveness of their response to globalization, which they noted had been very poor, while another 6 reported no intention to change, despite the fact that only 2 of them felt they had been highly effective in tackling globalization.

While legitimate concerns can be raised about the generalizability of the findings presented here given the small sample of locals involved, there appear to be some issues regarding how locals are responding to global pressures. The level and type of activity that this study reveals, when contrasted with the recommendations in the literature, suggests that a sizeable number of locals, perhaps even a small majority, may be responding suboptimally to the pressures posed by globalization. Because outcomes have not been positive, they may be developing the mindset that success is not possible, and therefore making the decision to attend to domestic concerns instead.

This could explain the disinterest of some of the locals in forging international ties as well as why memberships are not necessarily mobilizing to seek change, and even when they are, why they are not seeking changes that would support the goals of social unionism. But even domestically, organizing outside traditional jurisdictions remains rare, the need to develop community ties is not being recognized or acted upon in some quarters, and poor relationships continue to impede cooperation. While some locals have looked ahead and have established long-term strategic goals, and have also been proactively responding to global pressures, others have not. The key question is why.

One possibility is that these locals are unable to change because they are restricted by factors that could be changed if the will to change them existed. Some of these might be union cultures and traditions, bureaucracy, representation structures, historical conflicts and the like, all of which restrict the range of available options. There was some evidence in the transcripts that not all locals are open to trying things that are new and different, and that some of the commitment to progressive practices is mere rhetoric. Therefore, research into the factors affecting the attitudes of local leaders and members toward experimentation with new practices, structures, etc. would be useful.

Another possibility is that these less proactive locals are in the unenviable position of being truly unable to respond adequately in the short-term because of their particular industry sector, an unsupportive legislative environment, and lack of resources. These concerns were mentioned frequently in the transcripts. While these locals might be willing to change, they are unable to change, at least in their own minds. There is some evidence in the data that being unable to overcome obstacles erodes confidence. Greater levels of support from parent unions, central labour bodies and/or other unions, as well as from the community, might enable these locals to develop a more positive attitude and a greater capacity to address global issues effectively.

For example, locals or unions could share resources, membership fees to belong to central labour organizations could be reduced for smaller locals, differential fee structures could be developed to enable all locals to attend conferences where information is shared and strategies discussed, and parent unions could make a special effort to assist smaller locals. All of these would be positive steps. But if the legislative regime is at the root of their troubles, it is unlikely that isolated local efforts will be able to solve the problem. Organized labour must band together to make a concerted effort to secure change. Developing greater labour solidarity and mobilizing labour and community resources will be critical to achieving success. From a research perspective, further examination of the support structures available to locals and under what circumstances they are accessed is merited.

A third possibility is that although these locals do have the wherewithal to adapt successfully, they see no need to change. This might indicate that they are not spending enough time analyzing their environments to identify the potential threats posed by globalization, or that they do not have the resources or the training to do the job adequately. Alternatively, perhaps they are falling victim to the illusion of numbers that Murray (2004) noted. If locals are only measuring the adequacy of their responses by whether or not membership numbers are rising or falling year-by-year, their planning horizon may be far too short to identify longer-term threats to their futures.

For instance, they should be mindful of the ILO's (1997) ponderings about whether a different kind of institution might be needed to better protect workers' interests, or the threat posed by the imminent retirement of a large proportion of their membership. Again, it is the labour movement's responsibility to ensure that all union leaders and members thoroughly understand the threats posed by globalization, even for those locals not yet seeing any direct effects, and those in relatively "safe" industrial sectors, in order to build strong labour solidarity and mobilize workers to protect their interests. Community groups and/or academics could play a greater role in helping unions to realistically assess the need for change.

Although the first two possibilities may partially account for the inaction revealed by this study, it is more plausible, given the high levels of confidence in the future that were expressed by almost all of the locals in this study, that the need for change has not yet become sufficiently pressing to make action necessary. However, there may be other explanations and other important contextual factors yet to be discovered. Certainly, further exploratory research into the contextual factors affecting local responses to globalization is warranted.

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RÉSUMÉ

Pour comprendre la réaction des syndicats locaux à la mondialisation

Pour une adaptation réussie à la mondialisation, les syndicats doivent (1) organiser des secteurs nouveaux ; (2) tisser des liens à l'interne et entre les syndicats du pays, avec des organismes du travail centraux et avec des syndicats à l'étranger ; (3) accroître leur capacité de mobilisation des membres en vue d'effectuer des changements en questionnant les structures syndicales internes, en cherchant à conscientiser leur effectif, en forgeant des liens avec la communauté aux plans local, national et international ; (4) développer une conscience sociale et (5) appuyer des initiatives de la part des employeurs pour apporter des modifications aux lieux de travail ou bien

élaborer leur propre ordre du jour dans ce domaine. La preuve empirique à ce jour concernant le degré auquel le travail organisé s'est adapté à ces changements démontre qu'il existe de sérieuses raisons de questionner son habileté à changer de manière à relever les défis que présente pour lui la mondialisation. Cet essai procède à l'analyse de ce qu'on a accompli dans vingt-deux syndicats locaux du secteur privé en vue de faire face à ces pressions et des raisonnements à l'appui de ces initiatives.

La méthodologie. Les données ont été recueillies chez des syndicats locaux du secteur privé dans le secteur manufacturier, de la technologie et des services, au cours de l'automne et de l'hiver de l'année 2002-2003. Les représentants des syndicats nationaux identifiés à l'aide du Répertoire des organisations de travailleurs et de travailleuses au Canada (Workplace Information Directorate, 1998) ont été contactés pour sélectionner les personnes, au sein des syndicats locaux, les plus aptes à discuter des défis résultant de la mondialisation. Au cours de ces contacts initiaux, la mondialisation a été définie en termes de ses effets : la perte d'emplois au profit des compétiteurs étrangers, l'augmentation de la concurrence étrangère, les accords de libre-échange qui ont débouché sur la déréglementation, la privatisation et ainsi de suite. En bout de ligne, quarante syndicats locaux ont été approchés et vingt-huit entrevues furent convenues, dont vingt-deux impliquaient des représentants de syndicats du secteur privé. Cet essai s'appui donc sur des entrevues téléphoniques conduites auprès de ces vingt-deux représentants.

Les syndicats retenus comptaient entre 50 et 26 000 membres. Treize comprenaient moins de 2 500 personnes, alors que deux en comptaient plus de 15 000 ; dix-huit étaient affiliés à une union internationale ; six se trouvaient dans le secteur manufacturier ; neuf, dans celui des services et les autres présentaient un effectif qui recoupait plusieurs secteurs. Les secteurs représentés de l'industrie comprenaient l'acier, l'énergie, les télécommunications, l'automobile, l'alimentation, l'industrie laitière, l'agriculture, la coupe du bois, la préparation des viandes, la construction, le transport, les soins de santé privés, l'hôtellerie et l'habillement. Les questions posées au cours de l'entrevue portaient sur la façon dont les syndicats locaux étaient affectés par la mondialisation, sur ce qu'ils faisaient à son endroit, sur les résultats de leurs actions et sur l'appréciation qu'ils faisaient de ces résultats, en l'occurrence, s'ils en étaient satisfaits ou non. Nous avons aussi demandé aux répondants de commenter l'utilité, pour leurs unités en particulier, d'un certain nombre de stratégies mises de l'avant par les organisations du travail à l'échelle de la planète en vue de contrer la mondialisation. Enfin, on a recueilli des données de caractère démographique. Les données ont fait l'objet d'analyses quantitative et qualitative.

Les conclusions. Nous avons regroupé les conclusions sous trois rubriques : (1) l'ampleur et la direction de l'impact de la mondialisation ;

(2) les réactions typiques du syndicat local à la mondialisation ; (3) les facteurs de contexte influençant les réactions.

1. L'ampleur et la direction de l'impact. Quoiqu'autant de syndicats locaux aient accru leur effectif (n = 9) au cours des cinq dernières années que d'autres ont perdu de leurs membres (n = 10), les commentaires des répondants indiquaient que les principaux défis posés par la mondialisation consistaient dans les fermetures d'usines, la réduction de la production ou l'introduction d'une technologie qui éliminait des emplois locaux et le déplacement des emplois vers d'autres pays. Alors qu'un commentaire à l'occasion signalait que la mondialisation avait ouvert des marchés à l'étranger pour les produits canadiens ou qu'elle avait contribué à la création d'emplois pour des travailleurs au Canada, treize syndicats locaux considéraient que la mondialisation avait un impact négatif, alors que les autres indiquaient que des effets à la fois positifs et négatifs s'étaient manifestés. Huit parmi les treize syndicats locaux rapportaient que la mondialisation les avait affectés d'une façon négative, une proportion légèrement plus élevée que celle qui prévalait dans l'ensemble des syndicats. Un des syndicats parmi les plus gros considérait que la mondialisation exerçait dans l'ensemble un effet positif.

Les syndicats locaux se sentaient désavantagés à la table des négociations lorsque l'employeur brandissait la menace d'une relocalisation, parce qu'ils se sentaient incapables de concurrencer d'autres pays, où la main-d'œuvre était moins dispendieuse, où les normes de sécurité et de protection de l'environnement étaient moins exigeantes. Ils croyaient aussi improbable le fait d'obtenir un meilleur environnement au plan de la législation, parce qu'ils croyaient que les gouvernements n'écoutaient que le monde des affaires, et non le monde du travail syndiqué.

2. Les réactions typiques à la mondialisation chez les syndicats locaux. D'une manière exemplaire, les syndicats locaux cherchaient à protéger les emplois, les salaires et les conditions de travail de leurs membres. Pour ce faire, leurs méthodes privilégiées consistaient dans la formation d'alliances avec d'autres sections locales ou d'autres syndicats pour partager de l'information et agir comme lobby auprès des gouvernements en vue d'apporter des changements à la législation. Elles consistaient également à éduquer leurs membres et le public en général sur les défis posés par la mondialisation et la manière dont le monde des affaires causait un tort aux communautés, tout en s'occupant d'organisation syndicale à l'intérieur du pays et à l'échelle internationale. Quelques syndicats locaux mentionnaient que la pauvreté des ressources et l'opposition des employeurs gênaient le travail d'organisation syndicale et son succès.

3. Les facteurs de contexte et leurs effets. La taille du syndicat local, le degré auquel les syndicats locaux étaient affectés par la mondialisation,

le caractère positif ou négatif de ses effets sont apparus des facteurs importants de contexte. Le secteur industriel était aussi un facteur important parce que tous les syndicats locaux, tant dans le secteur manufacturier que dans ceux de l'aciérie, la préparation des viandes, les services, la forêt et l'agriculture semblaient être frappés beaucoup plus durement que dans celui du secteur public. Le support disponible du travail organisé, des syndicats parents, des autres syndicats locaux, voire même des employeurs venait atténuer quelque peu les effets négatifs de la mondialisation si on pouvait l'obtenir. Cela survenait en autant que les attitudes à l'endroit de la collaboration y étaient favorables. Enfin, les idées des membres sur les priorités locales commandaient souvent une stratégie de syndicalisme d'affaires, préoccupée par l'interne et le court terme, alors que la réponse à la mondialisation était perçue comme tombant sous la responsabilité d'un syndicat parent ou des organisations centrales et non sous celle du syndicat local.