GLOBALIZATION AND UNIONIZATION: CAW RESPONSE

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Abstract

Globalization has negatively impacted organized labour in high cost countries as a result of high paid manufacturing jobs moving to low cost countries. This paper addresses how globalization has impacted union membership and what the recommended strategies are, according to pro-labour academia, in order for unions to remain vital organizations. The recommended strategies are then compared to how the CAW has responded (at both a national and local level) to globalization. Using a qualitative approach, I focused on academic papers and books that were written in the past decade on the subject of globalization and union revitalization. In order to acquire the local union response to globalization, I interviewed a local union leader which also provided added context to the CAW research and academic research. The paper concludes with recommendations on how unions could better strategize to ensure they remain vital organizations.
Globalization and Union Revitalization: CAW Response

**Background:**

As a Human Resources practitioner, I am interested in researching globalization with respect to its’ impact on trade unions in general over the last decade and the strategies recommended for unions to respond to the global pressures they are facing. Within that context, I have compared and contrasted specifically how the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) has responded to global pressures versus the literature’s recommendations. I have concentrated on South Western Ontario where manufacturing has experienced heavy job loss. From a national perspective approximately 77,000 manufacturing jobs have disappeared in the period of 2001-2006 according to Stats Canada and CAW membership has declined from 265,000 to 225,000 according to CAW statistics but from a local perspective (Local 1524 located in South Western Ontario) the job loss has been even more staggering with almost 50% of the local CAW jobs disappearing. Local 1524 saw their membership decline from over 2000 members in 2004 to approximately 1100 today. The objective is to determine what the union locals’ understanding is of the impact of globalization on their organization as compared to academic research and whether they are responding effectively to globalization. Specific research questions addressed are:
• What is globalization and how has it impacted unions in the last 10 years?
• What are the recommended strategies for unions to remain vital organizations in the context of globalization according to pro-union academic researchers?
• How has the CAW responded to globalization and have they been successful in terms of remaining vital organizations? (i.e. membership levels/negotiating power at the bargaining table/community involvement)

Following are the operational definitions for this study:

**Globalization**: The worldwide integration of product and capital markets, the negotiation of free-trade agreements and the ascendance of market ideology that has changed government involvement in the regulation of domestic economies. (Foley, 45)

**High Cost Countries**: Countries where multi-national companies are located that have costs higher than other countries and due to improved technology, removal of trade barriers etc. they can benefit by locating activities of the business outside of their home country. USA, UK, Canada, Australia, and West European nations are considered to be high cost countries. (Lockstrom, 18)

**Low-cost country sourcing** (LCCS): Co-ordinating and integrating procurement requirements of world-wide business units, through acquisition of goods and services from suppliers in countries with a lower comparative price level compared to the home country of the buying firm.
Examples and most popular regions are China, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, India, Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria, Mexico, Bolivia, Brazil and Czech Republic. (Lockstrom, 20)

**South Western Ontario: Windsor to Toronto corridor**

In general, globalization has negatively impacted organized labour in high cost countries as a result of high paid manufacturing jobs moving to low cost countries. Naturally the loss of membership creates a loss of revenue and union density which diminishes their power at the bargaining table. As labour has weakened, concessions on wages and working conditions have been made in exchange for job security (albeit limited). Various points of view from academics are explored on the issue of globalization and their recommended strategies for unions to employ in order to effectively deal with globalization. Research on the CAW was conducted in order to ascertain their perspective on how globalization has affected their organization and what national and local plans are in place in order to ensure they remain a vital organization. Literature and presentations outlining their approach was accessed at [http://www.caw.ca](http://www.caw.ca).

Additional background on the affect of globalization on Canadian workers can be found at [http://www.cprn.org/](http://www.cprn.org/) which presents various research papers that focus on issues facing workers due to globalization. An international perspective of globalization on unions can be found at [http://www.ilo.org/global/lang--en/](http://www.ilo.org/global/lang--en/).

An interdisciplinary approach was used by integrating the disciplines of sociology (study of the CAW), economics (understanding the economic consequences of globalization on labour),
and political science (understanding the political reaction and motivation towards globalization and union involvement). The advantages of integrating these different disciplines in my research are a broader perspective on how globalization impacts union membership and potentially a broader audience appeal. For example, the research is not only be useful to unions but to political activists as well. The paper provides a review of recommended approaches for unions to deal with globalization as well as a summary of how the CAW is responding to the global pressures they are facing.

Three dimensions along which unions can strategize to deal with globalization are: membership dimension, economic dimension and political dimension. (Frege, Kelly, 20) Each of these dimensions will be considered when mapping out the recommended strategies unions should consider for revitalization and in turn how the CAW has considered these dimensions in their revitalization struggle. For instance, the membership dimension is not just about recruiting new members to replace the lost membership base; changing the attitudes and expectations of existing members is a large part of this dimension. It is paramount that the existing membership is open to and engaged in the drive to change its’ composition and culture in order to effectively adjust to globalization. The economic dimension includes bargaining power with the employer and the unions’ ability to influence wage and benefit improvements as well as having the necessary financial resources for social justice campaigns. The political
dimension refers to the unions’ ability to influence government at all levels in order to favourably impact legislation and policy.

**Literature Review:**

Research papers and books selected were chosen based on providing different academic perspectives on how unions should respond to globalization in order to ensure they remain vital organizations. With the current economic challenges that businesses are facing in Canada due to increased globalization of trade and investment, the accelerated pace of technological change and the growing competitive pressures from low cost countries, business is demanding greater efficiency and flexibility which threatens the traditional role of unions. Thus, papers and books providing perspectives on the impact of globalization with recommended strategies for union revitalization were reviewed. Various qualitative and quantitative methodologies of research were used in the papers including ethnographic, case studies, questionnaires, archival material and interviews. Papers and books were included not only from North America but also Europe and Australia to further broaden the perspective. Finally, research on the CAW’s approach for dealing with globalization via their website was conducted to compare and contrast the academic recommendations.

*Work in Tumultuous Times* edited by Wallace Clement and Vivian Shalla is a collection of essays focusing on how the current political economy has transformed the state of work in Canada particularly at the worker level. The final chapter “Remaking the Canadian Labour
Movement: Transformed Work and Transformed Labour Strategies” by Rosemary Warskett reflects on how this transformation has affected the Canadian labour movement and labour’s response to those changes. Warskett points out that to rebuild the labour movement in the current political and economic context, labour will need to create a much stronger inclusion of culture and social justice. Likewise, Precarious Employment—Understanding Labour Market Insecurity in Canada edited by Leah Vosko also offers a collection of essays but specifically examines the growth of precarious employment (jobs with limited social benefits, statutory entitlements, job security and low wages). Part 4 of the book deals with the union dimension of precarious employment and how unions could use the growth of precarious employment to renew community interest and support for unions. The essays echo Warskett’s view that a broader, more political social movement is required specifically aimed at including more women, immigrants and minorities in order to revitalize the labour movement. Varieties of Unionism: Strategies for Union Revitalization in a Globalizing Economy edited by Carola Frege and John Kelly also provides a compilation of essays that stress the need for trade union movements to recreate themselves as social movements and to rediscover their capacity to mobilize workers for wider social justice rather than concentrating solely on the immediate employment relationship. These three books were extremely useful for their relevant case study examples and practical approaches to union revitalization. The authors pointed to the fact that unions cannot rely on their traditional national frameworks if they expect to remain vital organizations; they must consider how workers will be affected by a globalized economy
and reframe themselves in a broader context. Unions need to concentrate on the changing labour workforce rather than just their member base and become engaged in the emerging social justice issues.

Janice Foley’s article “Explaining Local Unions’ Responses to Globalization” is a 2002/2003 study of how twenty two Canadian union locals are responding to the global pressures of employment security, wages and benefits at a local level. The study revealed a high level of inaction and need for change, likely due to the high level of confidence in the economy unions had at the time. Christian Levesque’s and Grego Murray’s article “Understanding Union Power: Resources and Capabilities for renewing union Capacity” support Foley’s article in that they believe union leaders and members have not adapted to or accepted the changes associated with globalization which has led to their declining membership and influence. Don Wells explores the affects of unions cooperating with management, which he terms micro corporatism, in order to achieve greater efficiencies to compete in the global market in his article “Labour Markets, Flexible Specialization and the New Micro corporatism: The Case of Canada’s Major Appliance Industry”. Wells concludes that micro corporatism weakens the social unionism aspect of unions as the union becomes more aligned to the business and management versus community activism. Therefore the approach requires vigilant focus on the part of the union to ensure their function does not simply mesh into the corporate function
of managing to the bottom line. Overall, these articles provided an excellent insight to the strategies Canadian unions were using to deal with globalization.

From an international viewpoint, “International Labour Regulation: What Have We Really Learnt So Far?” by George Tsogas highlights how international regulation has developed over the last two decades and how trade unions could play a role on various issues at the international level versus the traditional local/national level. This was an interesting article from the point of view of how an international organization such as the International Labour Organization could help unions revitalize their charters and memberships by focusing on broader social justice issues whereas the essays in Globalization and the Future of Labour Law edited by John Craig and Michael Lynk concentrate on the importance of building cross-border alliances particularly with American unions in order to positively influence labour laws and trade agreements. Ruth Barton and Peter Fairbrother studied union initiatives in Australia that focused on the transport and logistics industry in their article “The Local is Now Global: Building a Union Coalition in the International Transport and Logistics Sector.” They show how three sets of union leaders from the logistics and transport sector in Australia addressed globalization by building a successful coalition and the article is an excellent case study of how union coalitions can be a powerful tool for unions.

The national website for the Canadian Auto Workers provides many of the correct signals for building social awareness around inclusion and social justice. For example, they have specific
departments and programs dedicated to aboriginal workers, workers of colour, PRIDE (lesbians/gays/bisexuals and transsexuals), women and youth. They are involved in various campaigns that reach beyond their traditional issues such as promoting a day dedicated to raising awareness on ending violence against women and the concerns of precarious workers. Several political initiatives are underway related to our current economic situation such as campaigns to pressure government to develop severance and pension protection programs for employees of bankrupt employers, employment insurance program improvements, and a call for governments to adopt a policy of having a minimum level of Canadian content for public purchases. From an international viewpoint, the CAW is promoting an initiative to end the proposed Canada-EU Free Trade agreement, encouraging members to raise awareness of the agreement and write letters to their MPs expressing their disagreement with it because they believe the result of the agreement will be job loss in Canada. The CAW also has a Social Justice Fund which was established in 1990 and provides solidarity assistance to non-profit and humanitarian projects within Canada and around the world. While there is a link to a page on international solidarity, it represents an extremely small portion of the information available on the website; Canadian issues and content dominate the website. Overall, the website is well written, easy to navigate and presents itself professionally. It contains a great deal of information and is an excellent resource for its members and those interested in the organization.
The local union website (Union 1524) contained no reference to international issues or organizations. Their newsletters were focused on local issues only and the most recent newsletters concentrated on job losses and plant closures with the focus and blame being on either the employer or the government. None of the articles in the newsletters touched on the broader issue of globalization or strategies on how to deal with globalization. Overall, the local CAW website provided an extremely myopic view for their members; the only social justice activity that was referenced was support for a local aboriginal land claim protest that was being planned in a nearby city. In contrast to the national CAW website, the local website is very weak with few links and outdated graphics.

**Aims and Objectives:**

Using a qualitative approach to research I focused on academic papers that have been written in the past decade on the subject of globalization and union revitalization. The purpose and objective of this research was to gather opinions on how globalization has impacted unions in high cost countries and what strategies they recommend to union organizations in order to deal effectively with globalization. Once this research was examined, I explored the CAW’s approach to globalization in order to compare/contrast it to the research. This provided me with two valuable perspectives of globalization and union revitalization: that of academic researchers and that of a Canadian national union. I believe it is important to get both perspectives in order to validate the factors of effective strategy with respect to globalization
with both groups. Looking ahead, I would be interested in using the results of this paper to develop a case study in conjunction with the CAW to be used as a labour education tool on how to proactively deal with the globalization issues facing unions.

Methods:

A qualitative approach using a semi-structured telephone interview with a local union representative in South Western Ontario was used to contextualize the CAW data and validate the academic research. This method of interview was utilized in order to collect attitudinal information and to allow the greatest degree of flexibility in terms of explaining the purpose of the interview, clarifying questions and following up on the interview. The interviewee was provided with an information sheet prior to the interview which outlined the purpose of my study and sought their permission to participate. (See Appendix A) A copy of the signed sheet was given to the participant and I retained the original copy. They were provided with the list of interview questions in advance in order to allow them advance time to consider their answers and therefore optimize my time with them. (See Appendix B) Responses were written down by me in summary format.

Data Analysis:

The data analyzed is the data gathered from academic research and the data gathered from the CAW both through their national and local websites and through the one on one interview.
Comparative analysis was made to determine if the academic research recommendations were being followed by the CAW and if not, where the gaps are and why the gaps exist.

**Ethical Issues:**

As stated earlier, the purpose and objective of this research project was to research globalization with respect to its’ impact on trade unions in general over the last decade and the strategies recommended for unions to respond to the global pressures they are facing. Within that context, I have compared and contrasted specifically how the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) have responded to global pressures versus the literature’s recommendations using information available on their website and an interview with a local union representative for added context. The guidelines provided in the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* were followed as per the following description. I interviewed a union representative from a local (South Western Ontario) CAW branch using an inductive mode of research and focused on exploratory and descriptive approaches. The starting point of my research was semi-structured, via telephone, in order to examine how they feel globalization has affected them and how their union has been responding to the affects. The interviewee received an information sheet describing the project and was asked to sign a consent form.

The potential for harm was not significant in that personal information about the interviewee was not gathered and the purpose of the interview was to provide context to
information that is publicly available on their website. The potential for benefit is an increased knowledge on the part of the union on how their strategies for revitalization compare to strategies recommended by academic researchers as a copy of the final paper will be made available to the interviewee.

**Dissemination and Policy Relevance:**

Upon completion of this project, I will provide a copy of the paper to the local CAW chapter for their consideration and a copy will be filed with Athabasca University per the requirements set out for the MAIS program. As discussed in the Aims and Objectives section, the purpose of providing the local CAW chapter with a copy of the paper would be to gauge their interest in developing a labour education tool on strategies for dealing with the effects of globalization according to academic researchers and how the local union can put those recommendations into action for their members. The literature review summarized current thinking from pro-union academic researchers and provides strategies on union revitalization along three dimensions: membership dimension, economic dimension and political dimension. The goal of promoting the findings of the research is to provide the union with knowledge from objective outside sources on how they can maintain and enhance their organization within their community and also to provoke discussion on the success of their strategies for dealing with globalization.
Key Findings

Any strategy for union revitalization must include three basic dimensions: membership, economic and political dimension but the underlying assumption is that the strategy must take into account the negative impacts of globalization as their main purpose for revitalization. Unions that are stuck in their national frameworks will continue to lose power and will find they are unable to react to dynamic global firms, trade, migration of jobs and other international issues affecting labour. (Frege & Kelly, 160) Union revitalization is important because it not only affects the quality of life of its members but also affects the quality of the broader civil society and political life by weakening one of its largest and most significant civil actors. (Frege & Kelly, 181) As the pressures of competition and capitalism continue to grow, employment levels in heavily unionized Western manufacturing industries have significantly declined which has greatly weakened the bargaining power for unions to extract concessions and demonstrate their effectiveness to workers. Thus, unions need to move away from the servicing model of unionism which places all its emphasis on representing and supplying services to the current union membership to an organizing model which gives a higher priority to signing up new members, even if it means taking union resources—staff and money—away from servicing the established membership. (Shalla & Clements, 389) Following is a description of the dimensions as well as recommended strategies according to pro-union academic researchers that unions
should undertake in order to increase their membership, economic and political dimensions thereby leading to their overall revitalization.

Membership Dimension

The membership dimension could be measured by three factors: an increase in membership numbers, an increase in membership density and a change of union composition. An increase of membership numbers is obviously important to increasing financial resources and bargaining power for unions which they can then translate to launching public relation campaigns within their own membership as well as within their communities. Density is a valid factor because it reflects the share of the workforce that is unionized and therefore can imply legitimacy, representativeness and bargaining power. Membership composition is an equally important dimension because as the composition of the workplace changes, unions must ensure their composition reflects that change. For example, the traditional male worker with stable full-time employment can no longer be the target of union drives. Unions must focus on the growing workforce of women, immigrants and part-time/temporary contract workers. At the same time, unions must recognize that with this change in membership a change in priorities of the members will also take place. Focusing on the right priorities will lead to a more engaged membership and a more engaged membership will bring more active and enthusiastic support for union campaigns and political activities.

Political Dimension
Revitalization along the political dimension can be measured by their ability/effectiveness to influence legislation and government policy. One method to accomplish this is by working to secure victory for a particular political party that is supportive of their concerns resulting in more favourable labour legislation of labour market regulation. Unions may also engage in political activity such as operating as a lobbying group, functioning as a social movement or using collective action such as general strikes to pressure government or even acting as litigants to challenge government legislation. Political action may not always result in favourable outcomes but it can nonetheless strengthen the union movement in the form of positive public reaction to the value of unions as well as giving their membership a common vision or goal to rally behind. If the union gains community sympathy, the mobilization of community support can augment the union’s bargaining power with their employer as well as their influence level with the government. The political dimension is therefore strategic to the union’s ability to minimize the affect of globalization on its members as well as the community in which it resides.

Economic Dimension

The economic dimension of a union is measured by its financial stability. When a union has a strong financial dimension, they have the resources to extend their activity beyond the workplace and can pursue wider social and political change. This allows them to be seen as positive change agents within the community and can have the effect of increasing their
influence with government and employers. In order to remain vital organizations, unions must broaden their policy agenda and engage in social justice activities such as international labour standards, the living wage campaign, and protection of pension funds etc. In order to do so, they must have economic resources beyond the traditional practical level where the main financial objective was to be able to supply cash and food to their members in order to sustain strike action. This traditional level of economic self reliance is simply ineffective when dealing with the issue of globalization.

Union coalition/merger is a powerful tool that can be used to strengthen all three dimensions and should be considered not just from a national perspective but also from a cross-border and international perspective. If unions are serious about revitalization they must question their traditional membership dimension and broaden their goals to take into consideration the social justice issues that arise from globalization and increase their capacity to mobilize workers in campaigns for workplace and wider social justice. (Frege & Taylor, 136) Mergers and coalitions can often provide access to new membership or client base with a more diverse range of issues and interests therefore strengthening their numbers and density. For example, the composition of the union will obviously be impacted in a union merger and the unions will be forced to broaden their policy agenda to take their new membership into account, which should result in a more inclusive definition of solidarity. (Frege & Taylor, 154) Globalization is an international issue and therefore unions also need to consider international
action which may include international union mergers in order to increase their influence of
global firms and markets. The mobilization of greater numbers of people to facilitate
campaigns such as consumer boycotts, demonstrations etc. should be a motivating factor for
unions to consider mergers or coalitions as a method of union revitalization. For instance, a
coalition with a non-governmental organization (NGOs) such as Oxfam which possesses
expertise on labour conditions in developing countries, international contacts and a history of
action on labour standards can confer legitimacy on a trade union and its activities thereby
increasing its political dimension. (Frege & Kelly, 140)

Union coalition is also a powerful tool that can be used to increase the economic state of
unions. Coalitions can result in valuable shared physical resources such as premises and
technology as well as increased human resources including infrastructure staff,
technical/subject matter experts, and networks of activists. Coalitions can also yield practical
economic benefit such as providing the resources necessary to launch social justice campaigns
or provide funding for a social justice cause. Successful social justice campaigns would provide
the union with legitimacy and acceptance in the public view which could lead to increased
membership by opening the door to future unionization of previously non-organized sectors.
(Vosko, 317)

Communication and education is a central strategy of revitalization of unions and, if done
effectively, can have a positive effect on all three dimensions. If unions can expand the worker
consciousness from the level of the individual worker to membership in a larger community or collective, they become more attractive organizations to non-union workers, thereby increasing the membership dimension. The servicing model of unions has been likened to the insurance policy mentality, where organizing campaigns appeal to workers’ individual self interest. However, this kind of organizing does not change the internal culture of the labour movement which is required for social unionism nor does it create a movement based on democracy, inclusion and social justice. (Shalla & Clement, 390) Union leaders need to educate their membership on the importance of developing a broader, more complex perspective by linking their workplace problems to social and political issues in the community and encouraging self activism versus self interest. Bev Johnson of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU) observed that social and political issues such as anti-racism or affirmative action have huge ramifications for unions: “Either pay attention or die...How are you going to organize workers who are predominantly people of colour when you don’t have any organizers who are people of colour? How are you going to service members effectively when they don’t see themselves reflected in the union staff? (Vosko, 328) Unions need to start thinking in terms of building a union base as a long-term process in a community, not just at a worksite. A successful historical example is the “One Big Union” established in Calgary in 1919 which organized precariously employed and mobile immigrant and migrant workers along with skilled urban workers. An example from today is the construction industry in Ontario where special legislation in 1993 mandated a single trade, multi-employer, province-wide bargaining in the
industrial, commercial and institutional sectors. The Ontario Construction Secretariat (OCS) was established in 1993 under provincial legislation thanks to labour friendly government (the NDP, led by Bob Rae) being in power at the time. Province-wide bargaining is facilitated by the designation of one employer bargaining agency and one employee bargaining agency, each of which holds rights in each trade. The agreement is binding to these bargaining agencies and they are not permitted to negotiate outside of the master agreement. Under this model, union locals control the labour supply by placing their members on various contracts through hiring halls—similar to the craft unions in the early 1900s. Since the collective agreement prohibits non-union subcontracting, subcontractors are compelled to recognize the union in order to bid successfully for jobs. (Vosko, 360) Unions can thus become more vital organizations but they must ensure their members understand the need for change in order to increase the membership, political and economic dimensions of their union.

CAW Response to Globalization

The CAW response at a national level is to use the issue of globalization as a rallying cry to their members and to the community: “...we have a glorious opportunity to expose the failings of the current order and step up the fight for more humane alternatives.” (“We Will Fight This Crisis”, 1) They have chosen a defensive stance for their argument “We must organize against this crisis in a way that shows that workers didn’t cause this crisis, that workers refuse to pay for it, and that our economic alternative supports good jobs, sustainable production and social
equality.” (“Building the Union in Hard times”, p 27) and their plan to revitalize their union takes into account the three dimensions (Membership, Political and Economic) as recommended by the academic researchers. “The first is to build the strength of our union and the vitality of the labour movement, the second is to convince governments there is a high price to pay for their continued disdain and the third is the need to construct a new model of economic development.” (“Fighting for Good Jobs”, 16) The CAW holds annual constitutional conventions and produces a discussion paper which serves as their mandate for the coming year. The discussion papers from the last two conventions have focused on the issue of globalization: “We Will Fight This Crisis: The Economics (and Politics) of the Global Financial Meltdown”, “Building the Union in Hard Times” and “Fighting for Good Jobs” (CAW website Jan 18, 2011) and communicating to their members on the need to fight neo liberalism in order to maintain the gains made in society by unions.

From a membership perspective, the union recognizes the change in membership composition and density from both a sector point of view and the diversity of its members. For instance, in 1987 roughly 90% of their members worked in the manufacturing sector with 42% of those members in the auto industry. Today they have roughly 45% of their members in the manufacturing sector with only 10% of those members in the auto industry. Females made up approximately 12% of their union in 1985 and today they make up approximately 34% of the CAW and 75% of the labour force. (“Building the Union in Hard Times”, 11) Their plan is to change their union composition to better reflect the employment projections, developments in
the labour forces, shifts in industrial composition and in the demographics of age, race and
gender. For instance, their union is aggressively targeting the retail, construction and
healthcare sectors for organization as they are the fastest growing occupations in Canada.
(“Building the Union in Hard Times, 12) From a diversity standpoint, the union understands
that visible minorities are the fastest growing population in Canada and that they need to plan
for generational change as these new Canadians enter the workforce. To this end, the CAW
has established several national committees and organizations to provide a voice to groups that
have not traditionally held a seat at the union table: PRIDE (targeted at lesbian,gay, bi-sexual
and transgendered workers), Aboriginal Workers and Workers of Colour, Women and Youth
groups. The CAW offers these groups special educational/conference opportunities and
encourages their local organizations to support these groups and to establish
groups/committees at a local level.

The CAW at a national level has been very active in the political dimension, doing exactly the
types of activities recommended by the academic papers researched for this paper. For
instance, they have been working on building stronger alliances with other sectors and
movements such as seniors with their campaign to develop minimum standards of care for long
term care facilities and other unions/civil society organizations to form the “Trade Justice
Network” to stop the free trade agreement with the European Union. They have campaigns to
raise awareness of poverty issues, precarious employment and are actively lobbying the
government for increased protection/benefits of public pensions, employment insurance and
severance benefits. All of these activities are aimed at broadening their scope beyond the
traditional union concerns and is clear that the CAW realizes “It is essential, moreover, that
unions confront the crisis by building stronger alliances with other sectors and movements.
Unions cannot win these crucial battles alone.” (“We Will Fight this Crisis, 21)

The economic dimension is predictably a difficult issue for the CAW. They have lost close to
25% of their membership since 2008 (“Building the Union in Hard Times”, 16) and over 30
locals. Their response to the decreased financial resources is to launch organizing campaigns in
new sectors as well as to organize new members in the traditional sectors using the locals.
Locals are encouraged to consider merge with other locals where resources are too constrained
to launch organization campaigns effectively. “Mergers have now started at the Local level. In
the last three years 10 locals have merged with other locals. In a period of declining
membership, mergers are on the agenda. While every situation is unique, it makes sense to
find ways to combine our resources and share costs.” (Building Union Capacity, 23) In addition,
the CAW has openly stated “The trend in union mergers will likely continue and the CAW is
open to merging with unions whose values and direction are compatible with our own and who
share our commitment to social unionism and political activism.” (Building Union Capacity, 23)

Based on the information available on the national CAW website, the communication
materials and education available to members is excellent. There are booklets/training guides
for all of the campaigns; there are courses targeted on their current issues such as “Building
Strong Locals”, “Building Social Networks” and “Global Economics” as well as workshops
targeted at leadership skill development. It is clear from the national CAW website that the union is focused on raising the awareness of their members from their own individual issues to broader, societal issues such as poverty, precarious employment and the issues of our senior citizens. At a local level, leaders and members take their cue from the national organization. The national organization expects the local leaders to be vocal in the community and to express the views of the CAW through literature and local rallies. The literature and training produced by the National organization provides guidelines and suggestions on what the local unions can do to raise public awareness of their issues. From a membership perspective, the local union encourages their members to attend political rallies, buy Canadian manufactured goods, shop in unionized stores and educates their members on which political leaders are supportive of union policy. From a political standpoint, the locals challenge the local political candidates to move from a free trade policy to a fair trade policy where goods sold in Canada must have some “made in Canada” component. The local union feels they have achieved the greatest impact against globalization with the economic dimension because they have been able to negotiate work commitments into their agreements. These work commitments ensure that any new business the company acquires must “roll over” to existing Canadian plants and not to off shore operations. However, while the negotiating tactic of ensuring work commitments are included in contracts, the local union leader feels in order to have a meaningful impact on globalization, the CAW must get political candidates who are supportive of labour into elected positions. They have had limited success to date both federally and provincially with this objective. The
local union does not feel mergers with other unions are necessarily the right move because different unions have different mandates. For instance, there is concern that the Canadian mandate may be lost in a Canadian-American merger. However, they are supportive of collaborating with other unions as a show of solidarity in order to achieve a higher level of influence with political leaders.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

While globalization may be inevitable and everywhere, its impact to union membership in high cost countries is not predetermined. However, unions must be open to change and supportive of change which may make their union weaker but the labour movement as a whole stronger. While the national CAW does have active campaigns to regenerate their membership, political and economic dimensions in response to globalization, they have certainly not embraced the notion of mergers or coalitions as a method to address their weakening state. Although they are open to merging their own locals where necessary they certainly do not appear to have a strategy for pursuing mergers or coalitions. At a local level, the union is operating as a servicing model as opposed to an organizing model. In general, the organization appears to be closed to those outside their membership and it is perplexing, given their links to the post secondary sector, why they have not partnered with labour academics. Having said this, there is hope with the Centre of Labour Management Relations (CLMR) at the
Ted Rogers School of Management at Ryerson University which opened in September 2010. (Ryerson website, January 27, 2011) The school, the first of its kind in Canada that is funded by both labour and management, offers an opportunity where leaders from labour, government, public and private sector organizations can jointly tackle issues, undertake research and network in a non-partisan environment. However, one cannot help but be suspicious that it has the potential to become a form of micro corporatism weakening the social unionism aspect of unions as the union becomes more aligned to the business and management versus community activism. The intent of the centre is to better understand labour-management relations and conduct research on such topics as alternate models for worker representation, pension sustainability, public sector labour relations, and workplace issues such as job security and mental health. Though in its infancy, it is promising to see a research centre that brings together labour leaders, academics and business leaders to advance labour-management relations, explore important current issues and hopefully lead to out of the box solutions for those negatively impacted by globalization and not simply advance neo-liberalism.
Works Cited


Journal Articles


Web Sources

“Our will Fight This Crisis: The Economics (and Politics) of the Global Financial Meltdown” caw.ca. caw, 2009. September 27, 2010
“Building the Union in Hard Times” caw.ca. caw, 2009. September 27, 2010


www.ryerson.ca/clmr
Appendix A

Information Sheet to be provided to the interviewees

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me. My name is Lisa Rutherford and I am interviewing you as part of my Master’s thesis which deals with globalization and its’ impact on unions, specifically the CAW in South Western Ontario. I am going to ask you 8 questions to get your opinion on how globalization has affected your organization and what your strategy is to deal with it. The whole interview will take 45-60 minutes. Please feel free to “skip any questions that you are not comfortable with and I would like to emphasize that all of your answers will be kept confidential and your identity will not be revealed in the final research paper. With your permission, I would like to use a recording device in order to capture all of our dialogue which will help me with the analysis of the data. Transcripts of the interview will not be released.

Please sign below to indicate your understanding and agreement to participate in this research.

I agree to take part in this interview and I understand that all information provided in this interview will be kept confidential and my identity will not be revealed in any way. In addition, I am free to end the interview at any time.

____________________________________________________________________

Signature and Date
Appendix B

Interview Questions:

1. How long have you been in the CAW organization and how long have you been in your current position?

   Since the inception of the CAW in 1984 and has been in his current position with the Local chapter for 4 years.

2. How do you define “Globalization” and how has it affected your particular organization?

   Globalization = Race to the bottom, with a redistribution of wealth amongst the top 10 capitalist markets. The impact has been the manufacturing sector moving out of the country to Mexico and China and he feels in 5 years, it will be India for the cheapest labour and least barriers to conducting business as far as environmental/health & safety regulations for employers.

3. What is the CAW doing at a national level to minimize the impact of globalization? Please consider membership, economic and political efforts.

   Political - have discussions with political leaders to move from a free trade policy to a fair trade policy – stop allowing countries to dump their products here when we do not have the same rights in their country; have a policy that if you want to sell products here, you must make them here. Influence the currency policy so that every country is playing by the same rules – some countries manipulate the value of their currency whereas Canada allows the market to set the currency rate.

   Membership - The CAW encourages their membership to attend political rallies, buy Cdn manufactured items, shop in unionized stores, educate members on which political candidates are supportive of union policy.

   Economic – Negotiate work commitments into agreements so that new business must “roll over” to existing Cdn plants and not go off shore. This clause protects the current work as well as future work.

4. Do you feel their efforts are successful? If so, in what way? If not, why?
Yes—on a small scale, the negotiating tactic of work commitments has been successful, we have some people in the political arena that are supportive of labour. The CAW has NOT done anything yet for the upcoming elections but will be starting to communicate to the public on who they support. They will be asking members to attend local debates to make sure their issues are being discussed and they will try to get publicity for their cause in newspapers.

5. What is the CAW doing at a local level (South Western Ontario) to minimize the impact of globalization? Please consider membership, economic and political efforts.

The local level takes their cue from the national organization. The national organization expects the local leaders to be vocal in the community, expressing the views of the CAW, highlighting issues, producing literature and ensuring local members know which political candidates the CAW supports. The National organization produces guidelines and suggestions on what locals can do, provides literature, the local produces a bi-annual newsletter.

6. Are the efforts at a local level successful? Is so, in what way? If not, why?

Federally, no, we have not been successful in getting our candidate in. Provincially, yes, we have had success and have also been pleased with the work commitment clauses they have been able to add to contracts. In the last 6 years their membership has declined more than 50%. In 2004 the local had over 2000 members, today they have 1100 members.

7. In your opinion, what should your union do at the national level to minimize the impact of Globalization? At the local level?

They need to focus on the bargaining issues, like the work commitment clause. They need to band together with other organizations such as CUPE/Steelworkers etc. and work collaboratively with them in order to better increase political pressure. They have more clout politically when they act together. However, mergers are not necessarily the right move because different unions have different mandates and there is fear the Canadian mandate would be lost if they merged with an American union. The CAW does not actively look for unions to absorb.

At the local level, we support rallies that are collaborative with other unions and conduct Days of Action to increase public awareness so the public can make informed and educated decisions on how their choice of political leader will affect them. The goal is for the public to consider not just the candidate that supports tax cuts but to consider the candidate who wants to support those who have lost their job.
8. How will you measure whether your union has been successful at minimizing the impact of globalization?

This is tough to measure but if we start to see corporations shifting manufacturing back to Canada or the US instead of off shore, we know we have been successful. The CAW is still a strong union and now represents all kinds of workers/sectors, not just manufacturing or auto workers. We will continue to diversify our membership and engage other workers in other sectors and encourage them to join the CAW. Globalization has caused a systematic erosion of the middle class and that is what we want the public to understand. We hope Canada does not become a nation of haves and have nots and we must band together to tell politicians that we do not want to become that. Those who are losing their well-paying factory jobs are moving to the service industry which is typically low pay and we need to move this industry away from paying minimum wage.