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# The National Council of Canadian Labour
# Le National Council of Canadian Labour et la fusion

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Article abstract

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# The National Council of Canadian Labour

**Clive Thomas**

*The position of the National Council of Canadian Labour towards the Canadian Congress is that the CLC is simply the newest and the most spectacular "front" for international (American) unionism created in Canada. The author explains briefly in this article the reasons for such a statement.*

When the Trades and Labour Congress (AFL) and the Canadian Congress of Labour (CIO) merged in April of last year in Toronto to form the Canadian Labour Congress (AFL-CIO), the fundamental situation to which the NCCL is so strongly opposed was not changed one iota — a substantial proportion of Canadian trade unionists continued to be under the effective domination of United States unions.

## Difficulties for a small minority

Writing in the December, 1956 issue of the "American Federationits," published by the AFL-CIO in Washington, D.C., Claude Jodoin, President of the CLC, admitted that "the more than 70 per cent" of Canadian trade unionists who are in international unions are "a very definite minority" in those organizations. Most of the "minority" unionists are in Jodoin's congress.

The Canadian members of an international union rarely comprise more than five per cent of the total membership. That means that they can be overwhelmed on any issue at an international union convention, that the international executive board that controls them will be composed preponderantly or even exclusively of citizens of another country, and that officials in that other country can suspend their local union government in Canada by imposing appointed "administrator" or "trustees" and otherwise run them in an arbitrary fashion.

Not too long ago, the international executive board of one

THOMAS, CLIVE, general secretary of the National Council of Canadian Labour.

particular international union turned down a request from a group of Canadian members that the letterheads they used be printed in Canada. One of the major international unions operating in Canada requires all Canadian agreements to be approved and signed at the head office in the United States. A high proportion of Teamster locals in Ontario were said last year by a member of the Ontario legislature to be run by "trustees" appointed from the union's regional headquarters in Detroit.

These are but a few instances of the type of "minority" unionism represented by the "Canadian" Labour Congress which is now described as being "the united Canadian labour movement". If the word "captive" were substituted for "Canadian", the description would be far more appropriate.

## Role of the CLC

It is therefore difficult for an all-Canadian labour organization like the NCCL to see how the CLC can advance the cause of a genuinely national labour movement in this country. What the CLC is doing, in effect, is wrapping a bigger and more flamboyant Maple Leaf around the United States unions operating in Canada in what seems an abvious attempt to make those unions appear more "Canadian" to workers and the general public.

The CLC has made it clear that its policy will be to channel workers into the international unions by co-operating with the international groups in their organizing drives, or by setting up "federally chartered" locals of the CLC that in due course will be turned over to the appropriate internationals.

Thus, in addition to serving as a spectacular "front" for United State unionism in Canada, the CLC also actively aids the further spread of international unionism in this country. When the One Big Union in Winnipeg agreed to join the new congress last year, it was on the basis that within two years its constituent locals would be allocated among the appropriate internationals.

It seems clear that if the CLC's policy were pursued without opposition over a period of time, it would result in the 100% absorption of Canadian trade unionists into American unions. It is indeed strange

that an organization calling itself "Canadian" should be party to such a policy at a time when Canadians in general are becoming more nationally-minded and aware of Canada's unfolding destiny as a great sovereign nation.

The NCCL believes there is a great danger to Canadian workers arising from the possibility of actual collusion between United States unions and United States corporations operating in Canada.

It was reported that the collective agreement covering the construction of the Trans-Canada Pipe line was negotiated and signed in the United States without any reference to the Canadian workers who would be involved. If it be true that large sections of various Canadian industries are American-owned, the Canadian workers in those industries should be represented by purely Canadian labour organizations that can be relied upon to express a distinctively Canadian viewpoint in dealing with American-owned enterprises.

### Importance of Canadian Union Merbership

Apart from such questions as the foreign domination of Canadian labour and the desirability of having Canadian unions as a counterbalance to foreign corporate ownership, the NCCL also feels it important to consider the common sense aspect of Canadian unionism. Last year total union membership in Canada was announced as being 1,351,652. Allowing for the fact that some of the large round figures reported by various international groups are clearly open to question, it is nevertheless true that union membership in Canada has grown large. Can it be argued reasonably that the more than one million Canadian trade unionists could not run their own union affairs free from all foreign influence or control? To suggest such a possibility would be to insult the intelligence of Canadian workers.

Clearly, Canadian labour has grown sufficiently in size and experience that it is today well-fitted to run its own exclusive national movement. It is indeed appalling that thousands upon thousands of dollars are being paid yearly by Canadian workers in support of United States organizations that could instead be contributed to the building of a genuinely national labour movement.

The NCCL does not believe that the CLC, by condoning this state of affairs, merits the designation of "Canadian," and that it

cannot be considered as contributing to the development of Canadian unionism.

However, it may be asked why Canadian members of international unions do not take concerted action to set up purely Canadian organizations. The answer to that question is control and intimidation. International union control is exceedingly effective. There are many deterrents to such action in the constitutions of the international groups, and if all else fails, intimidation and the smear technique can always be used against rebellious members.

### Desire of Autonomy

What is not too well known is that there is a growing undercurrent of unrest among the Canadian memberships of many international groups, ranging from persistent demands for more "autonomy" at international conventions to sudden breakaway movements, such as among an important group of tunnel workers recently in British Columbia. All such attempts to weaken the international union grip on Canadian workers are resisted fiercely by the international officials and their Canadian minions, often with crushing success, but nevertheless the demand for home rule and independence continues to be raised and will never be suppressed.

### Danger of International Unions

International unionism is the antithesis of a free and independent Canadian union movement, and cannot be accepted by genuine all-Canadian organizations such as the NCCL. In helping to perpetuate that type of unionism in Canada, the CLC acts simply as the agency of foreign organizations.

The leading officials of the CLC may deliver numerous resounding speeches on the development of "Canadian" unionism, but when the facts are known and understood, their words appear hollow.

Not the least objectionable feature of the CLC from the standpoint of the NCCL is the way in which that congress condones organizations which in the United States are notoriously racket-ridden. The International Longshoremen's Association, which was actually kicked out of the old AFL because it was infested with crooks and

hoodlums, is a member in good standing of the CLC. Other international unions which also have black records, are equally "acceptable" to the CLC.

How a "Canadian" congress could possibly include organizations with such shady records can be understood only when it is realized that the international union elements, which were in control in both the Trades and Labour Congress and the Canadian Congress of Labour, were instrumental in setting up the CLC last year in Toronto. Naturally, they could not be expected to blackball themselves from their newest Canadian show-window.

Writing about union racketeers in the February, 1957 issue of the Detroit "Wage Earner," Father Wm. J. Smith, S.J. declared, "What percentage of men holding official position in unions qualify in this category is still an uncertainty." But it has been estimated that there are more than 3,000 hoodlums, racketeers, extortionists, union fund embezzlers, welfare fund looters and other crooked officials in the international unions.

The AFL-CIO is currently cracking down on some of the smaller fry, but it remains to be seen whether it will proceed against the bigger crooks — some of whom are prominent in American labour — unless it wants to run the risk of spitting "united" labour.

If there were no other reason for opposing American unionism in Canada, the NCCL would be opposed on the grounds that ordinary Canadian workers cannot possibly know the full background of the international unions they are constantly being pressured into joining. An organization that may put on an honest front in Canada to win members, may be run by men with the worst underworld connections in the United States. By the same token, certain international unions have served as conveyor-belts into Canada for communism in the past, and a few still do.

Can the CLC honestly claim it is blind to the seamy backgrounds of many of its United States affiliates? Certainly not after the acid-blinding of Victor Reisel brought the whole question of corruption in the American unions into glaring prominence. The CLC cannot investigate the actual facts about corruption in its international affiliates, and that proves perhaps more than any other fact that it is not a sove-

reign labour organization but a creature of the international groups that formed it for their own special purposes.

### The NCCL and the Future

Despite the seeming colossal size of the CLC, the NCCL is supremely confident of its own future as an independent Canadian labour federation and as the nucleus for an eventual truly national labour movement, for it believes that Canadian workers are rapidly losing faith in the racket-ridden and boss-run international unions. They are already beginning to realize that there is a better type of organization to which they could belong, and therein lies the hope for the eventual success and victory of all-Canadian unionism.

The CLC can never possibly be acceptable to all-Canadian trade unionists in its present form. Until it divests itself of its underlying international character, and ceases to be merely the front for United States union groups that wish to reap bigger and more lucrative dues harvests among workers in expanding Canadian industry, all-Canadian labour organizations will refuse to have any dealing with it.

In an attempt to discredit all-Canadian labour, the international unions linked with the CLC often pretend that organizations like the NCCL are "not recognized." Actually, the only non-recognition is on the part of the international unions themselves. It is a fact that the NCCL receives all the recognition it requires from government labour departments and labour relations boards to enable it to function successfully as a proper trade union federation.

Above all, the NCCL and its affiliated unions are recognized by their own members who directly benefit from their activities, and also by a growing number of Canadian workers in general who are coming to realize that the NCCL represents a desirable alternative to the type of foreign-controlled unionism that has held sway in Canada for many years and is now represented by the CLC.

In the last analysis, it will be the workers of Canada, not the autocratic officials of foreign labour organizations of their Canadian minions, who will put the full stamp of approval on all-Canadian unionism.

*SOMMAIRE*

## LE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CANADIAN LABOUR ET LA FUSION

Le National Council of Labour est d'opinion que le Congrès du Travail du Canada est tout simplement la plus nouvelle et la plus spectaculaire façade pour le syndicalisme international (américain) créé au Canada.

Les membres canadiens d'une union internationale constituent rarement plus de cinq pour cent du total des effectifs, et cela entraîne des conséquences sérieuses et désavantageuses pour eux.

Aussi, est-il difficile pour une organisation ouvrière purement canadienne comme le National Council of Canadian Labour de voir comment le Congrès du Travail du Canada peut faire avancer la cause d'un mouvement ouvrier purement national au pays; il aide activement à l'expansion plus vaste du syndicalisme international au Canada.

Il est vrai que bien des succursales de plusieurs entreprises canadiennes sont des propriétés américaines; mais les ouvriers canadiens dans ces entreprises devraient être représentés par des organisations purement canadiennes sur qui elles peuvent se fier pour exprimer leur point de vue exclusivement canadien auprès de ces entreprises.

L'an dernier, on annonçait que les effectifs globaux des organisations ouvrières canadiennes s'élevaient à 1,351,652. Aussi peut-on admettre raisonnablement que ce nombre imposant de syndiqués canadiens ne puissent diriger seuls leurs propres affaires sans contrôle ni influence étrangère?... Tous ces imposants milliers et milliers de dollars payés par les travailleurs canadiens pour supporter ces organisations étrangères pourraient facilement être utilisés pour édifier un mouvement ouvrier exclusivement canadien.

Mais qu'est-ce qui empêche cet imposant nombre de Canadiens membres de ces unions internationales de prendre une action concertée pour mettre sur pieds un organisme purement canadien? C'est le contrôle excessivement efficace des internationales... toutefois, il existe un courant d'insatisfaction chez un bon nombre de membres canadiens. Ce courant se manifeste extérieurement par un désir de séparation, « d'autonomie » et d'indépendance. De plus, certaines unions internationales ont été utilisées au Canada pour faciliter l'infiltration communiste et certaines le sont encore.

Malgré des dimensions colossales du Congrès du Travail du Canada, le National Council of Canadian Labour est extrêmement confiant dans son propre avenir en tant que fédération ouvrière canadienne indépendante et en tant que noyau pour un mouvement ouvrier éventuel vraiment canadien.