BETWEEN ACCOMMODATION AND TRANSFORMATION: THE TWO LOGICS OF UNION RENEWAL

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INTRODUCTION

Since the late 1980s, there has been a growing body of literature on union renewal. These studies focus in the main on either identifying union renewal (or revitalization) strategies at the national level or comparing renewal strategies across countries (Frege and Kelly 2004; Voss and Sherman 2000; Hyman 1999; Turner 2005; Turner 2006; Waterman 1997; Fairbrother 2005; Carew 2002; Wever 1998; Haiven 2006; Behrens et al. 2004; Orfald 2006).

In this paper, union renewal is defined as a continuing and purposive process of maintaining, re-establishing, rebuilding and reconfiguring the institutional and organizational sources of union power and strength in a changing environment. An institutional lens is thus used in analyzing union renewal, and in identifying and explaining its possible logics and outcomes. By ascribing an institutional dimension to the concept of union renewal, this paper argues for an understanding of union renewal as a process of change.

There are two key questions that this paper attempts to address. What are the logics of union renewal? What drives unions to embrace a specific logic of union renewal?

The paper is organized into five sections. Section 1 provides a brief discussion on the methodology used in the conduct of the study where this paper was based. Section 2 gives a redefinition of union renewal and discusses the two logics of union renewal. Section 3 compares and contrasts union renewal strategies and processes adopted by two national peak unions - the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) in Canada and the German Metalworkers’ Union (IG Metall) in Germany. Section 4 identifies the institutional change processes and outcomes related to union renewal initiatives undertaken by these two national peak unions. Finally, Section 5 concludes the paper.

METHODOLOGY

A review and analysis of several frames of reference and theories on associative and collective action and on class consciousness (Hall and Soskice 2001; Olson 1971; Offe and Wiesenthal 1980; Schmitter and Streeck 1999; Cohen and Moody, 1998; Hobsbawm 1964; Streeck and Thelen 2005) was done in conceptualizing the co-existence of two logics of union renewal presented in this paper - the logic of accommodation and the logic of transformation. To better understand how these two logics come into play or are expressed in union organizations in different political economies, a comparative qualitative case study of the renewal strategy and processes of CAW in Canada and IG Metall in Germany was done. Field research for the CAW and for the IG Metall case studies took place from March to August 2010 (Canada) and September 2010 to October 2011 (Germany), respectively.

THE TWO LOGICS OF UNION RENEWAL

In this paper, union renewal is about gradual change processes involving constant experimentation and learning on union restructuring, framing processes, organizing, bargaining, membership activation, mobilization, building support networks outside the union, political action, and other spheres of union

1 This paper is based on the author’s doctoral dissertation Between Accommodation and Transformation: The Contending Logics of Union Renewal in CAW and IG Metall, Department of Labour Studies and Welfare, Graduate School in Social and Political Sciences, University of Milan, Italy, October 2012.
activity. As institutional frameworks are continuously subjected to contestation and reinterpretation by different actors, union renewal becomes a continuous process of change. Moreover, as unions are membership-based democratic organizations of workers often coming from various sectors and occupational groups, the process of common and collective interest-definition critical to any union renewal undertaking is subject to ongoing debate and contestation within the union. Cohen and Moody (1998: 109) argue that ‘actually existing’ working-class consciousness is a more complex mix: characterized less by undifferentiated ideological domination than by inconsistency, contradiction, and lack of information. In this regard, interest-definition in relation to union renewal necessitates a much more complex ‘dialogical’ process involving much communication and dialogue within the union and more inclusive organizational efforts to change.

Like Offe and Wiesenthal’s (1980) proposition that the two logics of collective action – monological and dialogical – co-exist in labour organizations, this paper suggests that there are also two logics of union renewal – the logic of accommodation and the logic of transformation – which likewise co-exist in union organizations. Figure 1 provides the elements or dimensions of each of these two logics.

While a given institutional regime or context may impose a dominant logic of union renewal under certain circumstances, this logic typically co-exists with the other. The precarious co-existence of these two logics means that incoherence rather than coherence defines more often a union’s renewal strategy. Moreover, unions seem to be quite capable to operate simultaneously in different institutional contexts governed by these two logics, shuttling or oscillating between them depending on prevailing circumstances. This suggests that fluidity rather than rigidity or fixity characterizes the dynamics between these two logics.

Following the theoretical and empirical work on institutional change by Streeck and Thelen (2005), this paper postulates that while the logic of accommodation, on the one hand, is likely to follow an incremental approach to change through adaptation to maintain or continue existing institutional arrangements, the logic of transformation, on the other hand, aims at institutional discontinuity either (or simultaneously) through abrupt processes by breaking down and replacing existing institutions or through incremental processes amounting to a gradual transformation over time of existing institutions. Adapting Streeck’s and Thelen’s conceptualization of institutional change in union renewal helps to identify the specific nature of both the change processes involved in and the results aimed at by the two logics of union renewal.
Figure 2 shows that there are exogenous and endogenous variables that influence a union’s decision on which logic of union renewal to embrace or follow. While there may be others, the external variables considered include: the politico-economic landscape, industrial relations (including employer attitude towards unions), and the existence of labour-oriented political parties, and social movements (the latter two being part of networks of resources for unions). The endogenous variables include: union identity articulation, union structures for membership involvement and internal democracy, scope of representation, and the role of union leadership in change processes.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements/Dimensions</th>
<th>Logic of Accommodation</th>
<th>Logic of Transformation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Union philosophy, identity &amp; purpose</td>
<td>Heavy focus on cooperation and social partnership with the state and employers’ organizations</td>
<td>Union as part of a broader social movement for transformative change, recognizes the significance of new social movements</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Continuity or maintenance of labour institutions that enhance union influence and strength (i.e. works councils, supervisory boards, sectoral bargaining)</td>
<td>Demand construction of a new model of economic development that is not market-centered, but human needs-centered</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scope of representation and responsibility</td>
<td>Union members mainly of standard forms of employment</td>
<td>Embraces a multi-dimensional and multi-identity concept of working-class unionism, company-level bargaining, right to work legislation, etc.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Dominant model of representation either indifference, or opposition and resistance, or initiates extension of protection (Regalia, 2005)</td>
<td>Specialization of protection/reconfiguration of representation (Regalia, 2005); broader membership base across various sectors (regular workers, temporary workers, women, migrant workers, etc.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Object of renewal/revitalization</td>
<td>Continuity or maintenance of institutional sources of union influence and strength</td>
<td>Discontinuity of labour relations framework that perpetuates union weaknesses (enterprise-based unionism, company-level bargaining, right to work legislation, etc.)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Re-establishment of past gains (strengthening welfare state, Keynesian macro-economic policies)</td>
<td>Institutional change/state policies: making radical demands on the state on democratizing the economy, people participation in economic and political decision-making, labour-friendly legal framework, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Subject of renewal/revitalization</td>
<td>Union organization; mostly focus on organizational development and restructuring</td>
<td>Union organization and bureaucracy</td>
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<td>Union leadership</td>
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<td>Union membership</td>
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<td>Strategies/repertories of action</td>
<td>Collective bargaining (often marked by concessions and wage moderation)</td>
<td>Anti-concessionist collective bargaining; coupling bargaining strategy with political action</td>
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<td>Organizing (mainly workplace based but increasingly also targeting non-traditional forms of employment)</td>
<td>Community-based organizing</td>
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<td>Organizational development</td>
<td>Restructuring (mergers, amalgamated locals)</td>
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<td>Restructuring (mergers)</td>
<td>Expanding democracy (more frequent leadership change, culture of dialogue and debate)</td>
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<td>Partnership with employers (job regulation, skills training)</td>
<td>Deepening membership involvement and participation (rank-and-file committees, participation in union conventions and councils, capacity-building of members, members’ involvement in political activities and actions)</td>
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<td>Social dialogue (with employers and the state)</td>
<td>Developing union activists and members through political education and involvement in political action</td>
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<td>Engagement in electoral politics</td>
<td>Political mobilization (political education and campaigns, joining political groups or parties)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Use of militant labour action (strikes, solidarity strikes, pickets, mass protests, community organizing and mobilization, factory or building occupation, etc.)</td>
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<td>Building alliances and campaigns with community-based organizations and social movements</td>
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Reflecting on the two logics of exchange – the logic of membership and the logic of influence – in interest associations postulated by Schmitter and Streeck (1999), the paper draws parallelisms as regard the variables identified above that affect the two logics of union renewal suggested. Arguably, the variables relating to the logic of membership approximate the set of endogenous variables enumerated above. Meanwhile, the factors relating to the logic of influence may correspond to the exogenous variables identified above.

The logic of accommodation pursues changes in any but not necessarily all of the internal variables mentioned above. A change in one element does not always necessitate corresponding changes in all the other elements. The logic of transformation necessitates changes in all the internal variables as it is argued that there is interdependence among them within this logic of union renewal. A change in one variable necessitates concomitant changes in all the others. For example, enlarging the sphere of union representation to include atypical workers would necessarily start with the re-articulation of the trade union purpose and identity (enlarging the responsibility sphere). Reorganization of union structures, enhancement of capacities to represent and service these new members, and modification of decision-making processes have to follow too to provide space and voice for this type of workers. Concomitantly, the union’s framing and legitimization processes and mobilization actions would need to involve these workers. The interdependence of these internal variables distinguishes the logic of transformation of a union renewal project.

Relating the outcome of union renewal to institutional change lends to a more concrete description and accounting of the outcomes of a specific logic of union renewal. The desired outcome of the logic of accommodation of union renewal is continuity of the institutional sources of a union’s strength and influence, where they exist, by adapting to and reconfiguring institutional changes through incremental processes of change.

The logic of transformation of union renewal meanwhile has a dual dimension: it may pursue an abrupt process of change amounting to continuity through survival and return on the one hand, and simultaneously follow incremental processes of change leading to discontinuity through gradual transformation on the other hand. These two dimensions may proceed at the same time in different aspects of union processes, activities and actions.

When realized, the desired outcomes of the two logics of union renewal may have an influence on some of the endogenous union variables. Certain union structures, processes and strategies may have to be changed to sustain outcomes.

The desired outcomes may likewise have an effect on some of the exogenous variables. For example, if unions are able to implement pattern bargaining with some of the major players in an industry where enterprise-based bargaining is the norm, this outcome may lead to a reconfiguration of some aspects of industrial relations operating in this particular context.

In describing the categories of processes of change involved in the two logics of union renewal, the five broad types of gradual transformative change suggested by Streeck and Thelen (2005) are used as guide. These are displacement, layering, drift, conversions and exhaustion. Union renewal strategies and processes aimed at defending and taking back institutions as well as fighting back or changing institutions are described and analyzed using these categories.

In describing and analyzing how the two logics of union renewal are expressed and how they operate within various spheres of union activity, adjustments and changes observed in four union variables are put under the

\[\text{For a description of these types of gradual transformative change, see Table 1.1 in Streeck, Wolfgang and Kathleen Thelen (eds.). 2005. Beyond Continuity: Institutional Change in Advanced Political Economies. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 31.}\]
lens. These are the following: (1) union purpose and identity (vision-mission statement); (2) organizing and representation coverage; (3) organizational structures (including structures of decision-making and membership participation) and processes for membership involvement and decision-making; and (4) the role of leadership in change processes. These variables are also analyzed vis-à-vis the desired outcomes of the two logics of union renewal.

**Figure 2: The Analytical Framework**

**UNION RENEWAL IN CAW AND IG METALL: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS**

Following Hall and Soskice’s (2001) *Varieties of Capitalism (VoC)* approach, Canada is considered a liberal market economy, while Germany is an exemplar of a coordinated market economy. However, despite being situated in different political economies, the restructuring of the global auto industry and the accompanying neoliberal policies pursued by governments, albeit in varying degrees, in both countries have had a considerable impact on the unions, including CAW and IG Metall, throwing both unions on the defensive. Both unions have experienced decline in union membership for a considerable period (although for the first
time in 20 years, IG Metall experienced incremental membership increase in 2011) and membership apathy and indifference. At the same time, the welfare state in both countries has been the subject of reforms toward further retrenchment. Labour market reforms have also been undertaken in both countries that either threaten or gut job security, union security and worker solidarity. Many of these reforms undermine the unions’ institutional anchors of power and influence. As argued by Bacarro and Howell (2011), a neoliberal trajectory is a common thread that runs through the industrial relations landscapes of Canada and Germany.

Between CAW and IG Metall, it is the former that has been experiencing the intensification of employer resistance and avoidance to unionization. Intense union avoidance by employers is typical in liberal market economies like Canada where, beginning in the late 1980s and in particular under a Conservative government, neoliberalism has intensified.

In the case of IG Metall, while employers continue to press for wage moderation, flexibility in work hours, flexibility in bargaining, and reforms on pension and the welfare state, the 2008 financial crisis indicated their willingness to cooperate and coordinate with trade unions and the government. In short, social dialogue and social partnership is still intact in the German industrial relations system. Moreover, the active role the German government played in ‘tempering’ adjustment strategies (e.g. shouldering a proportion of the wages due workers for the shortened work hours) during the crisis that involved accommodations from both trade unions and employers’ organizations alike is telling that non-market coordination still reigns in Germany’s political economy.

Framing union renewal

For CAW and IG Metall, union renewal is both a survival strategy and an intentional change process. For CAW, union renewal means arresting membership decline and continuously building the union in the context of a changing environment. It means continuously challenging the union with new ideas and new ways of doing things. For IG Metall, union renewal also means addressing union decline and revitalizing the union organization. This is done by activating existing members through their involvement in union activities, particularly in firm-level bargaining, and in new membership recruitment.

For CAW, union renewal means strengthening its commitment to social unionism by: being sensitive to broader concerns, building coalitions with communities and supporting communities to fight for social issues, and getting involved in politics (i.e. campaigning for pensions, public health care, etc.). For IG Metall, union renewal means revitalizing the union organization and activating membership to become a social force in society that is capable of “shaping political development in order to achieve fair working and living conditions” (IG Metall website).

It is remarkable to note that both unions embarked on some sort of a ‘self-critiquing’ and direction-setting initiative as the first step towards building a renewal or turnaround strategy. This self-critiquing and direction-setting initiative involved debating the future direction of the union and the changes that have to be made to attain desired outcomes. More importantly, this initiative served as a venue for members’ involvement and participation in building a renewal strategy.

CAW, for example, convened task forces (in 1993-1994 and 1999-2000) that privileged participatory consultative schemes. In particular, the task force on working class politics in 1999-2000 involved a series of extensive focus group discussions with members and leaders and the conduct of survey involving 5,000 members on their political views - what should be the kind of union politics that members wanted to get involved in.

IG Metall embarked on its own ‘debate of the future’ initiative between 2000 and 2003. It involved a survey covering 120,000 members and non-members. It created an active dialogue, within and outside the union, on the future of unions, the economy and society in general. This debate, considered unprecedented and
innovative in the German context, showed IG Metall's openness to new ideas and to more inclusive and democratic debate and consultation.

In 2007, the reform-oriented Berthold Huber and Detlef Wetzel, the architect of the North Rhine Westphalia (NRW) organizing success, were elected president and vice president respectively of IG Metall. In 2009, along with the restructuring of the staff-heavy IG Metall head office in Frankfurt and the re-assignment of staff to districts and locals, IG Metall's came up with the paper 'Change to Remain Successful' which identified three critical dimensions of a successful turnaround strategy – membership participation, membership recruitment, and an organizing orientation. With the establishment of the Strategic Organizing Division in 2009, concrete actions toward building a strategic organizing model, which adapted many of the features of the US organizing model, started to take off.

**Emphasis on organizing**

Both CAW and IG Metall have put emphasis on new organizing. CAW's organizing strategy is both enterprise- and community-based. It involves a team of organizers comprising members of a rank-and-file organizing committee, staff organizers, and volunteer community-based organizers. Members or potential members are directly involved in organizing, not only to recruit new members, but as a way of developing activism among the members.

In CAW, there is an additional emphasis on movement building, on building coalitions with community organizations and social movements, given the fact that CAW is not a large and encompassing union (union organizing and collective bargaining are predominantly enterprise-based). Moreover, CAW has historically been built along social unionism. Also, there are many militant and anti-capitalist community-based organizations and social movements in Canada that advocate and fight for labour rights. Mobilizing support from these external resources of strength is thus vital to CAW's renewal.

In recent years, IG Metall has committed to new organizing in select sectors, particularly in the renewable energy sector where union density is very low, in the temporary agency work sector, and among the youth. More importantly, IG Metall has emphasized membership involvement and participation in new membership recruitment at the plant or company level. This is to complement the important role of works councils in organizing and membership recruitment at the workplace. Institutions and member activism are thus the key components of IG Metall's new organizing approach.

There are several 'new' elements in IG Metall's organizing approach: having real organizing teams, coordinated organizing actions, rank-and-file involvement in negotiations and organizing, and the joint organizing efforts between works councilors and members. As an initial step to building a space for developing union activists, IG Metall convened an Organizing Activist Conference in 2011 which drew participation from members at the shop floor level. IG Metall has expressed intention to make this activity more regular.

The gradual shift towards a member-centered organizing approach to union renewal is certainly new to IG Metall. By tradition, membership recruitment is done by a shop steward and works councilors who are union members. The new organizing that is now being introduced in IG Metall involves rank-and-file members actively doing recruitment work at their plant or company, using many of the organizing tactics employed by unions in the US and Canada (e.g. building a rank-and-file organizing team, home visits, focused or special recruitment campaigns, conversations with non-members at the workplace or outside the workplace, postings at the company's notice board, distribution of union material, etc.). The marked shift to a more activist and grassroots-oriented organizing strategy, as the center of a renewal strategy, is ostensibly a move along the logic of transformation of union renewal. It is transformational because it has the potential to gradually address in the long term union bureaucratization, organizational inertia, and membership inertia. Given a context where a union's institutional anchors of power are increasingly being undermined, winning back and
strengthening a union’s internal sources of power – members’ motivations, solidarity and ‘willingness to act’ – comes to be the natural logic.

Nonetheless, the logic of transformation is visible only in two areas: organizing to either maintain or increase membership density and, in parallel, trigger institutional vitality. In the other dimensions of union activity (i.e. collective bargaining, political influence) in IG Metall, the focus is still on coordination, social partnership, and social dialogue. In these dimensions, the logic of accommodation appears to predominate. In fact, the 2001 ‘debate of the future’ survey found out that 82% of IG Metall members saw the importance of the government, employers’ associations and trade unions working together. Coordination and cooperation of the social partners are also key in Germany’s trumpeted success in averting massive job losses during the 2008/2009 financial crisis.

To sustain organizing, both unions have come up with specific schemes to fund their initiatives. CAW has a cost-sharing scheme for new organizing where a local union provides organizers and shares half with the national union the cost of the organizing project. In the case of IG Metall, an investment fund of 20 million Euros is earmarked annually beginning 2012 to fund organizing initiatives undertaken by its districts and locals. Between CAW and IG Metall, it is the latter that provides substantial resources for new organizing. This is understandable because IG Metall, being the largest union in the world, with 2.2 million members (majority are in the manufacturing sector), has huge resources. Moreover, IG Metall’s recent reorganization of its executive board office in Frankfurt generated savings that are now reallocated to new organizing.

**Union restructuring and new union structures**

CAW has been constantly experimenting with new local structures that take better account of the changing nature of the workplace. The creation of union in politics committee and youth committee in every local are the more recent examples. Its shift to a general union type after its split from UAW in 1985 was a response to structural shifts and labour market changes in the Canadian economy. As a result, CAW represents about 255,000 workers (as of 2009) in 18 different sectors. Today, it has more members in the services sector than in the manufacturing sector. In 1987, members from major auto accounted 42%, while members from auto parts 17%. In 2009, members from major auto went down to 10%, in auto parts, 12%.

IG Metall’s initial expression of renewal in recent years is the reorganization of its executive board office at Frankfurt under its “IG Metall Project 2009” program. This program cut the national office staff by a third and redeployed staff to districts and locals where union activity and organizing takes place. To institutionalize an adapted version of the Anglo-American organizing model, IG Metall created two new structures: the Membership Development and Campaigns Department and, under this department, the Strategic Organizing Division. The latter is specifically tasked to develop a strategic organizing plan for IG Metall, train organizers and coordinate organizing initiatives of all districts and locals.

**New structures of representation and decision-making**

The heterogeneity of CAW’s membership naturally poses a continuing challenge to the union to constantly innovate on representation models. It has come up with Sectoral Councils to represent the distinct interests and demands of the various sectors it covers. Sectoral Councils are the venues to discuss and debate and map out industry-specific strategies, and develop political activities and campaigns. These structures provide a sectoral focus to CAW’s organizing work and for coordination of bargaining.

At CAW, all local unions have permanent structures for special groups of workers, such as women committees and youth committees. There is also the Union in Politics Committee (UPC) through which members get involved in various political and community activities. In local unions where a retirees’ chapter exists, retirees are entitled to a seat in local executive boards. Local unions also convene monthly membership meetings.
Following Regalia’s (2008) four types of union attitude on representing non-traditional types of workers, CAW’s organizing strategy and the variety of structures it has established, as well as processes of interest identification and aggregation it continuously reconfigures, indicate the willingness on the part of CAW to continuously innovate and experiment on new forms of representation. In this respect, ‘specialization of protection/reconfiguration of representation’ describes CAW’s representational model. There are two factors that push CAW to embrace this type of representational model: being a general union that espouses social (movement) unionism and the highly heterogeneous nature of its membership base.

Unlike CAW, IG Metall’s membership is less heterogeneous, counting members from the auto and metal sector, iron and steel sector, electronics, information technology, textile and garments, and wood and plastics. Of its total 2.2 million members, more than half (1.4 million) come from the metal and auto sector. There are specific structures within the IG Metall organization that serve as venues for specific types of non-traditional workers (i.e. youth, women, workers in the renewable energy sector, retired workers). Moreover, IG Metall’s campaign to intensify organizing using its new organizing approach will eventually necessitate the creation of new structures of representation within the organization, particularly a representation structure for temporary agency workers. Already, there are signs that point to this direction. The intensive organizing drive in the wind (renewable energy) sector, for example, is spearheaded by the Strategic Organizing Division, the new structure that is associated with change and new organizing. In this sense, and following Regalia (2008), IG Metall’s representational model may be going towards ‘specialization of protection/reconfiguration of representation’. As regards temporary agency workers, representation by IG Metall is mainly expressed through forging collective agreements with various employers’ associations in the temporary agency work business. These agreements, to date, have put wages of temporary agency workers at par with workers on regular contracts.

Repertoires of action

CAW’s renewal strategy is framed along the revival of the social movement dimensions of unions. As such, a number of its strategies are militant in nature. A social movement repertoire involves union action beyond collective bargaining, which includes: leading campaigns on public health care and public services protection, pensions, employment and pay equity, minimum wages, human rights, and employment standards; campaigning against free trade and US-Canada military interventions in other countries; campaigning to free political prisoners and labour leaders from all over the world; organizing in communities; doing community work (e.g. providing material and human resources to women’s shelters, donating and participating in running food banks, etc.); building stronger links with community organizations and social movements; sending ‘flying squads’ to strikes and pickets; ‘brief’ plant occupations; organizing and participating in mass protests and mobilizations (e.g. G20/G8 June 2010 demonstrations); and participation in electoral politics (e.g. supporting labour-friendly candidates, leafleting, door-to-door campaigning, etc.).

Meanwhile, IG Metall’s renewal strategy remains pragmatic, combining both institutional renewal (i.e. unionizing works councils to do membership recruitment) and membership activism. While it still remains steadfast on its commitment to coordination and accommodation, it has in recent years been focusing on a member-centered organizing strategy akin to the Anglo-American model of organizing, and engaging in various campaigns (e.g. ‘equal pay for equal work’ for temporary agency workers, minimum wage campaign, campaign to stop the adjustment of pension age from 65 to 67). Moreover, it is trying to generalize throughout the union organization the NRW organizing strategy, where rank-and-file union members are involved in firm-level bargaining, directly voting for and against bargaining proposals from both the union and management, and mobilizing protest actions when needed. In this regard, both logics of renewal are evident in IG Metall’s repertoires of action.
Shifts in bargaining logic

CAW has been pursuing master or pattern bargaining in the auto sector and in the health sector to take wages and working conditions out of competition. By focusing on democracy, wage solidarity, generational solidarity, opposition to two-tier wages, and no concessions, CAW’s bargaining philosophy and strategy may be considered following the logic of transformation. CAW’s anti-concessionist bargaining philosophy has in recent years been undermined by a series of concession bargaining, particularly in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis. It is in this regard that many critics foretell the demise of union militancy and the transformational vision of CAW. However, although CAW’s bargaining logic appears to be predominantly oriented towards the logic of accommodation in recent times, this is mediated by militant forms of political action pursued in aid of bargaining. As CAW espouses social unionism, bargaining is complemented by political action in the form of plant occupations, mobilization of community support, and supporting the enactment of legislations strengthening workers’ rights, among others.

While CAW tries to shift the bargaining logic from the enterprise level to the industry level, IG Metall is increasingly finding itself engaging in enterprise-level bargaining as a result of restructuring in the auto industry and the increasing demand for flexibility from employers. These developments have increased the importance of the firm level as an arena of regulation and representation. The increased salience of the firm level necessitates tapping important resources of power at the plant and company level. This calls for the local embedding of collective skills and solidarity among shop floor members. In this regard, bargaining at the firm level (mostly through the use of ‘opening clauses’) is becoming widespread. It is against this backdrop that in the NRW initiative, IG Metall bargaining strategy was comprised of three components: active bargaining, focus on raising product quality and productivity, and membership growth. This so-called three-pronged member-centered offensive strategy is the kind of bargaining approach that IG Metall now tries to generalize in the union organization. This bargaining approach involves elected workforce committees of rank-and-file members in negotiations at the firm level. Members are asked whether to accept or refuse ‘opening clauses’ or deviations from a sectoral collective agreement. For IG Metall, by combining worker participation, aggressive negotiations, job preservation, and new training opportunities in this new bargaining approach membership loyalty may be secured and strengthened in the short or medium term.

Role of leadership in union renewal

At IG Metall, union renewal as intentional change visibly came from the top leadership. The commitment of union leadership to new organizing, expressed in the establishment of necessary union structures and the setting up of a huge amount of resources, may account for the decisiveness of union functionaries in the implementation of several change-oriented processes. As an initial result, IG Metall experienced an increase in membership in 2011, after more than two decades of membership decline.

At CAW, union renewal is also clearly articulated by the union leadership. However, compared to IG Metall, CAW’s leadership is less visibly linked to the renewal processes. In fact, the idea of convening the task forces in the 1990s and early 2000’s did not come from the union leadership; it came from among the socialist-activists who were at that time part of the CAW national office. The fact that the creation of the UPCs (union in politics committee) was not accompanied by the allocation of union resources (both human and monetary) implies ambivalence on the part of the union leadership on the pursuit of union renewal as framed within the union organization, and despite the apparent coherence of CAW’s union renewal articulation in various conventions (2003 and 2009). This ambivalence may partly account for the limited gains of CAW’s renewal initiative (as of the writing of this thesis).
INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE PROCESSES AND OUTCOMES

Adapting Streeck and Thelen’s (2005) typologies of gradual institutional change, the union renewal-related institutional change processes that have been taking place in CAW come in the form of displacement, layering, drift, conversion and exhaustion.

CAW’s shift from an industrial to a general type of union represents exhaustion (i.e. the gradual breakdown of the industrial unionism over time). Layering is observed in the following: complementing full-time staff organizers with the rank-and-file organizers and community-based volunteer organizers; shift to pattern and coordinated bargaining; and going beyond electoral politics by engaging in new forms of political actions coordinated by UPCs. The increased salience accorded to rank-and-file organizing (‘organizing local’) over traditional staff organizing involves a process of displacement. Displacement also takes place when new forms of union politics will supplant the old practice of electoral politics. Drift took place when the union recognized that the UPCs failed to develop a new political culture that engages CAW members on social and political issues because the union neglected to effectively provide real opportunities and the required resources for the political training of members. CAW failed to nurture and support UPCs.

In the case of IG Metall, there was conversion in the institutional function of works councils in terms of membership recruitment. The rise of a ‘new’ organizing approach, coupled with the establishment of new structures of organizing within the union and the allocation of an organizing fund, represent a process of layering traditional practices of organizing. There is also layering with the spread of firm-level bargaining.

In terms of outcomes, between CAW and IG Metall, it is the latter that has to date achieved initial success, albeit incremental, of its renewal strategy in terms of both halting membership decline and actually increasing membership. Moreover, there have been member-led initiatives that have taken place recently (e.g. FAIR P(L)AY campaign, Lunch Walk) which are new to IG Metall. Of course, IG Metall tries to shape the kind of firm-level bargaining that has been spreading in Germany. This firm-level bargaining may in the long-term alter the bargaining landscape in the country. IG Metall’s initiative to use firm-level bargaining as an opportunity for intensive member participation at the shop floor may yield two contradictory outcomes in the long term. On the one hand, it may further legitimize derogation from sectoral agreements as members have a say at this level of union activity. On the other hand, it may further prevent derogation of sectoral agreements as activist members are more empowered and capacitated to resist further erosion of the terms and conditions of their employment. At the moment, IG Metall tries to focus on the latter.

The successful conclusion of bargaining agreements beginning 2010 between IG Metall and the various employers’ organizations in the temporary agency work sector in the steel industry may be considered as another institutional outcome of the union’s renewal strategy in this sphere of union activity. By being able to conclude a bargaining agreement (albeit only providing temporary agency workers the same wages as workers on standard contracts) covering temporary agency workers who are scattered in various enterprises, IG Metall has been able to take wages out of competition while at the same time being able to organize temporary agency workers. The way IG Metall has been organizing these workers may correspond to the type of representation which Regalia (2008) labels ‘specialization of protection’ or ‘reconfiguration of representation’.

For CAW, the initial outcomes of its renewal initiative are the creation of structures to democratize decision-making in the organization, to address representational and participation issues of a highly diverse membership base, and to develop new forms of political engagement by members. It has gained some degree of success in pursuing pattern and coordinated bargaining in several sectors: auto assembly, auto parts manufacturing, health sector (nursing homes), and some big retail chain stores (e.g. Metro).

As it espouses social unionism, CAW actively participated and supported the campaign by community-based organizations on minimum wage for low-wage workers in the province of Ontario. This campaign led to the enactment by the Ontario provincial government of an hourly minimum wage of 10.25 Canadian dollars. The
13-year struggle of CAW’s women’s committee to change the Ontario Occupational Health and Safety Act bore fruit as said law was amended to include violence among the grounds to refuse work.

CONCLUSION

The case studies of union renewal in CAW and IG Metall provide some empirical support to the precarious co-existence of two logics of union renewal suggested in this paper – accommodation and transformation.

The continuing dilemma of unions over survival and success hints at the co-existence of these two contending logics of union renewal. The two logics are visibly in the works in the various dimensions and facets of union renewal pursued by both CAW and IG Metall. Nonetheless, while a particular logic of renewal may acquire salience in one dimension of CAW’s and IG Metall’s renewal initiative, given the multi-dimensionality of union renewal and the extent of influence of the external variables (such as political and economic landscape, industrial relations system, existence of support networks), in practice it is difficult to pinpoint which logic dominates overall. In short it is difficult to generalize the dominance of a particular logic of union renewal in a union organization. The case studies also indicate that depending on certain conditions, there appears a sequential link between the two logics of union renewal, suggesting that union organizations may be capable of shifting from logic to another in addressing their dilemmas of survival and success.

Union leadership also plays a key role in union renewal. This is more evident in the case of IG Metall which, under the dual system of Germany’s industrial relations, derives power resources from institutions. The push for union renewal and change came from the top leadership of IG Metall. In building its strategic organizing strategy, the union leadership not only internalized local experiences (i.e. NRW organizing success) and ‘borrowed’ some elements of the Anglo-American organizing model, but also transformed existing institutions (i.e. Works Councils) to become vehicles of organizing and membership recruitment. Thus, in the case of IG Metall, institutions (i.e. sectoral bargaining and co-determination) and membership activism are the two important pillars of its organizing and renewal strategy.

In the case of CAW, national institutions of industrial relations mediated the strategic choices of union actors on union renewal. Union fragmentation, different labour relations laws, intensified union avoidance by employers, anti-labour legislations, and the withdrawal of pro-labour legislations in various provinces of Canada, continue to challenge the renewal processes and strategy of CAW. In particular, the existence of 11 different labour relations laws makes it difficult for CAW to actually mount a comprehensive renewal strategy. Different labour laws make a renewal strategy incoherent. It may also yield different outcomes. Unlike IG Metall, CAW is not privileged to have common institutions to derive power and influence.

In addition, CAW has to address varying interests of its very diverse membership which mostly come from the services sector where job security, wages, working conditions and unionization are more problematic. Interest aggregation of a highly heterogeneous membership is indeed a challenge in pursuing a common renewal strategy.

All these may have accounted for the limited gains to date of CAW’s renewal initiative.

Where institutional anchors of union power and strength exist, union renewal mainly focuses on regaining or reconfiguring these institutional power resources. This is highlighted in the IG Metall case study. The union’s renewal strategy focused on the following: ‘converting’ works councils into ‘organizing agents’; defending sectoral collective bargaining by controlling its deregulation to the firm level; and to effectively address this, activating members at the shop-floor by involving them in workplace negotiations and in the recruitment of new members. In effect, IG Metall’s renewal and organizing strategy is a combination of institutional revitalization and membership activism, the latter being a characteristic of Anglo-American union renewal strategy.
In the case of CAW, its shift to a general union abetted its shrinking membership in manufacturing. To increase membership, it focuses on intensive organizing at the workplace and in the community. As CAW espouses social unionism, part of its renewal strategy is its continuous engagement with and involvement in social movements, through which it gains strategic leverage to mount campaigns, lobby and fight for labour-friendly legislations at the provincial level, and projects its legitimacy in the Canadian public.

Finally, the IG Metall case study suggests that union ‘encompassiveness’ matters in any union renewal undertaking; that the larger and more encompassing a union is, the greater is the impact of union renewal in terms of the desired outcomes. In terms of increasing membership density as one goal and dimension of union renewal, IG Metall’s renewal initiative attained some level of success in first stabilizing membership numbers and then attaining modest membership growth beginning 2011. In this regard, it is possible that large encompassing unions in coordinated market economies pursuing some elements of the logic of transformation of union renewal may have better outcomes than those unions that solely pursue the logic of accommodation.

REFERENCES


