

Labor and the Class Idea in the United States and Canada

Why are unions weaker in the United States than in Canada, despite the two countries' socioeconomic similarities? Many view this crossborder distinction as a by-product of longstanding differences in political cultures and institutions. However, using detailed archival and statistical data, Barry Eidlin finds that this divergence is relatively recent, the result of different ruling-party responses to working-class upsurge in both countries during the Great Depression and World War II. In Canada, a hostile state response led to labor being incorporated as a class representative. In the United States, a co-optive state response led to labor being incorporated as an interest group. This embedded the "class idea" – the idea of class as a salient, legitimate political category – more deeply in Canadian policies, institutions, and practices than in the United States. Eidlin illustrates this through comparative studies of party–class relations, the effects of postwar Red Scares, and labor policy divergence. In each case, different patterns of political incorporation enabled or constrained labor's legitimacy and organizational capacity in different ways. Canadian labor's role as a class representative legitimized it and expanded its organizational capacity, while US labor's role as an interest group delegitimized it and undermined its organizational capacity. As a result, union density remained more stable in Canada, but collapsed in the United States.

Barry Eidlin is Assistant Professor of Sociology at McGill University. He is a comparative historical sociologist interested in the study of class, politics, social movements, and institutional change. His research has been published in the *American Sociological Review*, *Politics & Society*, *Sociology Compass*, and *Labor History*, among other venues. He also comments regularly in various media outlets on labor politics and policy.

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BARRY EIDLIN
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*In memory of my parents,
Anne Eidlin (1939–2012)
and
Fred Eidlin (1942–2016)*

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While nobody would mistake what appears in the following pages as anything other than an academic study, the central problems I address emerged out of my previous life as a full-time union organizer. Most of those years were spent with Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU), the rank-and-file reform movement inside the Teamsters Union. In those formative years, I developed what I consider to be an extended political family, which shaped my thinking and pointed me toward the key questions to ask. Above all I must thank TDU National Organizer Ken Paff for somehow having faith that an awkward, idealistic college kid could survive in the trenches of Teamster politics, and for teaching me what it really means to be an organizer. In my early days as an intern at

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Abbreviations

AAA	Agricultural Adjustment Act
ACCL	All-Canadian Congress of Labour
ACF	American Commonwealth Federation
ACWA	Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America
AES	Agricultural Extension Service
AFBF	American Farm Bureau Federation
AFL	American Federation of Labor
AFL-CIO	American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations
AFSCME	American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees
ALP	American Labor Party
ASU	Alabama Sharecroppers' Union
BSCP	Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters
CAA	Christian American Association
CAUT	Canadian Association of University Teachers
CAW	Canadian Auto Workers
CAWIU	Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union
CBRE	Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees
CCF	Cooperative Commonwealth Federation
CCL	Canadian Congress of Labour
CEP	Communications, Energy, and Paperworkers Union
CEQ	Centrale de l'enseignement du Québec (Congress of Quebec Teachers)
CFL	Canadian Federation of Labour
CIO	Congress of Industrial Organizations

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CIR	Center for Individual Rights
CIRB	Canada Industrial Relations Board
CIW	Coalition of Immokalee Workers
CLC	Canadian Labour Congress
CMA	Canadian Manufacturers Association
CPUSA	Communist Party, USA
CPC	Communist Party of Canada
CSN	Confédération des syndicats nationaux (Confederation of National Trade Unions)
CSQ	Centrale des syndicats du Québec (Congress of Quebec Unions)
CTCC	Confédération des travailleurs catholiques du Canada (Canadian Catholic Confederation of Labour)
CtW	Change to Win Federation
CWA	Communications Workers of America
DOL	United States Department of Labor
EFCA	Employee Free Choice Act
EPIC	End Poverty in California
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FCA	First Contract Arbitration
FE	Farm Equipment Workers
FERA	Federal Emergency Relief Agency
FHA	Farmers' Holiday Association
FLPF	Farmer–Labor Political Federation
FLSA	Fair Labor Standards Act
FMCS	Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service
FTA	US-Canada Free Trade Agreement
FTQ	Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec (Quebec Federation of Labour)
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GM	General Motors
HEW	United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare
IBT	International Brotherhood of Teamsters
IDIA	Industrial Disputes Investigation Act
IFLWU	International Fur and Leather Workers Union
ILGWU	International Ladies' Garment Workers Union
ILTP	Independent Left Third Party
IRDIA	Industrial Relations and Disputes Investigation Act
IWW	Industrial Workers of the World

JIC	Joint Industrial Council
KOL	Knights of Labor
LMRA	Labor-Management Relations Act (Taft-Hartley Act)
LMRDA	Labor-Management Reporting and Disclosure Act (Landrum-Griffin Act)
LNPL	Labor's Non-Partisan League
LSR	League for Social Reconstruction
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NAM	National Association of Manufacturers
NDP	New Democratic Party
NDWA	National Domestic Workers Alliance
NFU	National Farmers Union
NIRA	National Industrial Recovery Act
NLB	National Labor Board
NLRA	National Labor Relations Act (Wagner Act)
NLRB	National Labor Relations Board
NLRB-GC	National Labor Relations Board General Counsel
NPA	National Progressives of America
NPL	Nonpartisan League
NRTWF	National Right to Work Foundation
NYTWA	New York Taxi Workers Alliance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OLRB	Ontario Labor Relations Board
PATCO	Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization
PSSRA	Public Service Staff Relations Act
PSSRB	Public Service Staff Relations Board
RCMP	Royal Canadian Mounted Police
RNMP	Royal Northwest Mounted Police
ROC	Restaurant Opportunities Center
RTW	Right to Work
SDS	Students for a Democratic Society
SEIU	Service Employees International Union
SGGA	Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association
STFU	Southern Tenant Farmers Union
SWOC	Steel Workers Organizing Committee
TDU	Teamsters for a Democratic Union
TLC	Trades and Labour Congress of Canada
UAW	United Auto Workers
UE	United Electrical Workers Union

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UFC(SS)	United Farmers of Canada (Saskatchewan Section)
UFCW	United Food and Commercial Workers
ULP	Unfair Labor Practice
UMMSWA	United Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers of America
UMWA	United Mine Workers of America
USCC	United States Chamber of Commerce
USCS	United States Conciliation Service
USWA	United Steel Workers of America
VW	Volkswagen
WCL	World Confederation of Labour
WRPS	Worker Representation and Participation Survey
WU	Workers United
WUL	Workers' Unity League
WVS	World Values Survey

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