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.

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Labor and the Class Idea in the United States and Canada

BARRY EIDLIN

McGill University
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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Comparative historical research is only possible with the help of dedicated, competent archivists and librarians. In the course of my
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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

xx
# List of Abbreviations

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

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
List of Abbreviations

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