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Derek Hrynyshyn and Stephanie Ross

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Canadian Autoworkers, the Climate Crisis, and the Contradictions of Social Unionism

Derek Hrynyshyn[1] and Stephanie Ross[1]

Abstract

This article explores the contradictions in the Canadian Auto Workers Union's (CAW) approach to environmental issues, particularly climate change. Despite being one of the Canadian labor movement's leading proponents of social unionism— understood as a union ethos committed to working-class interests beyond the workplace, and a strategic repertoire that involves community-union alliances— the CAW's environmental activism demonstrates the contradictory way that social unionism can be understood and practiced by unions. Through a critical discourse analysis of CAW policy documents and leadership statements, we show the union has not reframed its bargaining demands to emphasize both economically and environmentally sustainable production. Instead, the CAW's relatively uncritical defense of the North American auto industry and the jobs it provides, despite the clearly negative role such production plays in the climate crisis, its acceptance of the structures of automobility, and its emphasis on environmental issues that have little to do with the nature of their industry, indicates the way that social unionism can be an add-on rather than a fundamental reorientation of a union's role and purpose. We argue that, for social unionist environmental activism to be effective, the CAW must incorporate social unionist goals and analyses into their bargaining priorities, and confront the contradictions between their members' interests as autoworkers, on the one hand, and as workers and global citizens who require economically and environmentally sustainable livelihoods, on the other.

[1]York University, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Corresponding Author:
Stephanie Ross, York University, Department of Social Science, 4700 Keele Street, Toronto, Ontario M3J 1P3, Canada
Email: stephr@yorku.ca

"We reject the blackmail of choosing job security over the environment."

Canadian Auto Workers (2007a)

"The environment, I repeat, is important, but our members' jobs are much more important to me."

CAW President Buzz Hargrove, Speech to CAW Canadian Council (2007a)

Introduction

The North American labor movement remains on the defensive after almost three decades of neoliberal economic restructuring, leaving it with much less structural power, both economically and politically. Both the global economic recession of 2008 and a heightened awareness of the environmental limits of our economic model have served to intensify the crisis in union strategy. There is a growing consensus that solutions to labor's problems will require more than effective bargaining. Instead, political solutions to economic and environmental problems are also necessary, and will emerge only with broad support and mobilization for new kinds of politics. In particular, dramatic new forms of state intervention in the economy that directly challenge the still-hegemonic neoliberal approach to policy making are needed to promote the creation of new jobs to replace those already lost to deindustrialization and those that will be lost due to the sunsetting of environmentally unsustainable industries in the future. Unions will have to work with other actors to press governments to adopt such policies. All this points to the growing importance of effective social unionism for union strategy on both economic and environmental questions. As such, an examination and assessment of social unionist practices, in general and with respect to environmental issues, and the extent to which it forms the basis for a transformative politics, is essential.

Since its split from the United Auto Workers (UAW) in 1984-1985, the Canadian Auto Workers' union (CAW) has been a leading proponent of social unionism in Canada, emphasizing its role as a "sword of justice" for the working class and broader community interests (Hyman 2004, 19). However, an examination of the union's environmental activism, and in particular of its responses to the challenge climate change presents to the viability of the auto industry as currently organized, demonstrates the limited way that social unionism can be understood and practiced by unions, restricted by its protection of "vested interests." The CAW national leadership has deemphasized engagement in coalitions with environmentalists that demand a shift to more economically *and* environmentally sustainable production. Instead, CAW officials have mounted a relatively uncritical defense of the North American auto industry and the jobs it provides, despite the clearly negative role such production plays in the climate crisis, and maintained an emphasis on those environmental issues that have little to do with the nature of the automobile industry. This case demonstrates the limits of social unionism: it is often an add-on to traditional union goals and strategies rather

than a fundamental reorientation of a union's role and purpose. Despite the CAW's explicit commitment to social unionism and its official recognition that the "jobs versus the environment" opposition is false, the union has neither prioritized environmentalist social unionist goals and analyses in bargaining, nor integrated and leveraged both workplace power and political power on this issue. Moreover, the union has not confronted the contradictions between some of their members' interests as *auto*workers, on the one hand, and as workers (the majority of whom now work in other sectors of the economy) and global citizens who require economically and environmentally sustainable livelihoods, on the other. The broader social and political interests of the community and the working class remain a secondary priority after the primary purpose of preserving auto jobs for CAW members. This inability to combine these interests ends up meeting neither. This case study thus examines the kind of social unionism practiced on environmental questions and explores whether it provides political, ideological, and strategic resources to deal with such formidable and potentially radical tasks.

We begin by reviewing the idea and practice of social unionism in general and its application to environmental issues in the Canadian context. We highlight the tensions between unions and environmentalists on the issue of industrial jobs, arguing that this reflects a broader tension—between the "sword of justice" and "vested interests" facets of union purpose—all social unionists must navigate. The manner in which this tension is expressed and worked out has important political implications for movement building. We then make the case for why Canadian autoworkers' approach to environmental social unionism is especially important to explore, given the centrality of the auto in contemporary capitalist society. We also explore the particular material and ideological terrain for environmental social unionism in the auto industry, namely the pervasive condition of automobility and its impact on the formation of autoworkers' identities and political-strategic horizons. Against this backdrop, we turn to trace the CAW's own conception of social unionism as applied to environmental questions and, through a critical discourse analysis of union policy documents and leadership statements, highlight the coexistence of—and conflict between—approaches that, on the one hand, emphasize broader solidarity and a willingness to challenge employers in alliance with other social movements and, on the other hand, confine environmentalism to issues that do not disturb labor-management relations in the auto industry and subordinate the need to transition away from unsustainable auto production to defense of the industry as is. As the latter remains dominant in the CAW, we conclude by discussing the larger implications of this narrowing of social unionism for the rest of the Canadian labor movement as well as the prospects for the struggle for economic and environmental sustainability.

A Note on Methods

The article relies primarily on critical discourse analysis, applying it to both union policy documents and leadership statements. Critical discourse analysis is a strategy to

uncover implicit meanings contained in and communicated through "texts," which can include both written, spoken, and visual representations. Systematic study of implicit meanings, through examination of the choice of words and symbols, helps to reveal the motivations actors provide for their activity, whether consciously articulated or not (Fairclough 2003; Gee 2005). This choice of method is connected to one of our main theoretical claims, that social movement organizations' definitional work, and the way they interpret both the political-economic context and the interests and capacities of their membership, is central to understanding their strategic choices (Johnston 2002). Our focus is to show how the CAW, and particularly its leadership, actively defines or frames workers' interests, problems, solutions, and, as a result, union strategy on the issue of the environment and climate change, resulting in both openings and closures of options. That said, the texts available to us are admittedly products of internal debate amongst different elements within the CAW, which a discourse analysis of official documents does not make visible. The process of contention over collective action frames is interesting in itself and important to understanding the extent to which leadership is reflecting, imposing, or challenging deeply held identities and political orientations amongst the membership. However, these debates are difficult to capture if one is not a participant in internal union decision-making bodies or does not have access to archival materials (which are not available in the case of contemporary debates such as that on climate change), and therefore remain outside the scope of our discussion. While we acknowledge the importance of such material to further analysis of these issues, the present methodology allows us to identify the important place that automobility discourse plays in the CAW's public self-representations and strategic thinking.

Canadian Unions, Social Unionism, and Environmental Politics

In the past several decades, many Canadian unions have adopted some form of social unionist ethos or practice and applied it to a wide range of political issues. As a pattern of union ideology and practice, social unionism involves a particular collective action frame as well as an identifiable repertoire of strategies and tactics. According to Benford and Snow, collective action frames are central to the work of social movements, as they "render events or occurrences meaningful . . . organize experience and guide action" (Benford and Snow 2000, 614). In particular, social movements' frames are political, ideological, and cultural constructs that provide a particular explanation of the world so as "to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists" (Snow and Benford 1988, 198). By defining the identities and interests of protagonists and antagonists and the nature of the problems faced and appropriate solutions, these frames provide a "set of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization" (Benford and Snow 2000, 614). Social unionism's collective action frame tends to involve an *antieconomistic* analysis of workers' problems and an *antisectionalist* definition of workers' interests and identities. On the first element, social

unionists tend to believe that because union members are more than merely wage-earners, but are also citizens with a wide range of other identities, they have experiences, problems, and therefore interests that extend beyond the workplace (Kumar and Murray 2006). Moreover, the power of employers extends out into the political, social, and cultural life, and the class and other inequalities workers experience shape other parts of their lives. On the second element, social unionists tend to adopt a more expansive definition of the community of "workers," framing issues in terms of general working-class interests rather than those of the most organized or strategically powerful segments of the working class. Both of these aspects provide a collective action frame that legitimizes taking on broader community issues as the proper focus of union activity as well as strategies and tactics necessary to act effectively on those more broadly defined interests.

Because its vision expands beyond the workplace and the union membership, social unionism tends to be associated with a repertoire of union activity beyond the collective bargaining process, including electoral politics (Schenk and Bernard 1992), non-partisan lobbying, coalition building (Tattersall 2005), "community unionism" (Tufts 1998; Bickerton and Stearns 2002; Cranford and Ladd 2003), and extra-parliamentary mobilization (Munro 1997; Camfield 2006).[1] Moreover, there is an important (if not deterministic) relationship between framing and strategic choices: decisions about what to do are not simply the product of pragmatic calculation but also of constructions of "who workers are" and therefore what such people can and should do. In that sense, as Barker and Lavallette argue, identity has strategic implications for social movement repertoire (Barker and Lavallette 2002, 142). Or, as Yates puts it, "[t]he ideological expression of a union's collective identity also shapes which strategic options will be considered viable by union members" (Yates 1998, 78).

While social unionism in word and deed emphasizes the "sword of justice" face of unionism, the dominant model of postwar business unionism has been associated with the defense of "vested interests." Business unionism is linked with a collective action frame that prioritizes union members' immediate and narrowly material interests in higher wages, better working conditions, and job security—expressed famously by Samuel Gompers as the desire for "more, more, more, now"—and a repertoire of action that emphasizes collective bargaining, the spread of industrial legality, and pragmatic engagement in political struggles that serve to increase union bargaining power (Hoxie 1914; Reed 1966). Like social unionism, "business unionism" has in practice entailed more nuance and variability than this simple characterization, and many "narrow" collective bargaining aims have led to broader working-class victories in the realm of both law and public policy (such as occupational health and safety legislation and working time regulation). Moreover, in the Canadian context, workplace-based union strategies have often been tied to and broadened by a commitment to social democratic politics (Schenk and Bernard 1992), albeit premised on a strategic division of labor between the unions and "their" political party, the NDP (Kumar and Murray 2006). However, the economic and legal weight of unions' collective bargaining role did result in many unions' privileging of that activity, often in ways

that emphasized the role of "expert" leadership over membership participation. As this model fell into crisis beginning in the 1970s, the presence of social unionism has either been used as an explanation for the relative vibrancy of the Canadian labor movement or an indication of renewal and movement beyond the economism and sectionalism of business unionism (Moody 1988; Robinson 1993).

One issue on which some Canadian unions have adopted social unionist analyses and strategies is the environment. In many ways, environmental protection is the quintessential social unionist issue. Workers' interest in a healthy environment is rooted in and transcends their particular workplace. Both workers themselves and members of the surrounding community feel the environmentally negative consequences of production. Complete and effective solutions to environmental problems—and to the global threat of climate change in particular—cannot be found in one country, let alone one workplace or bargaining table. Given the inability to contain such problems in the workplace, unions have adopted a social unionist repertoire—primarily union-community coalition work and political mobilization for legislative regulation of corporate polluters—on many environmental issues.

In the 1970s, many Canadian unions made links between community environmental problems stemming from industrial processes and workplace health-and-safety issues. Workers in Ontario's mining, asbestos, and chemical industries were early practitioners of political activism that linked their own exposure to cancer-causing toxins in the workplace to the impact of such pollutants on broader community health (Storey and Lewchuk 2000; Storey 2004). Keil has characterized such activism as "working class environmentalism," which is "not confined to the workplace" but rather "addresses environmental issues in urban, suburban and rural neighbourhoods" and "forg[es] strategic alliances with environmental and social justice groups, churches and other institutions" (Keil 1994, 18).

Environmentalist social unionism has also taken the form of "green jobs" coalitions. In 1991, Toronto-area CAW activists, struggling with major job losses produced by the aftermath of the U.S.-Canada Free Trade Agreement and the 1990-1991 recession, allied with Greenpeace to form the Green Work Alliance to advocate for the conversion of shuttered factories to produce socially useful and environmentally sustainable goods (discussed in more detail below) (Gray 1992, 2004; Keil 1994; De Carlo 2001). In 2009, the Canadian section of the United Steelworkers of America (USW) allied with Environmental Defence to found BlueGreen Canada, "to advocate for working people and the environment in key areas of global trade, the use of toxic chemicals in commercial activity, the creation of green manufacturing jobs, and in the development of strategies to address climate change," with a focus on promoting investment in sustainable energy production (BlueGreen Canada n.d., par. 1). Similarly, the Toronto and York District Labour Council has made "green jobs" a priority, pulling together over 550 local union leaders and activists, antipoverty activists, community organizers, and environmentalists at their *Good Green Jobs for All* conference in November 2009 and explicitly linking access to stable and quality employment with both environmentally sustainable production and equitable distribution of work (Good

Jobs For All Coalition 2009, pars. 1-3). All this indicates that there is not an "inherent" tendency amongst workers to organize around narrow defense of their jobs, as many environmental critics presume. While, as Keil (1994, 15) points out, "there is a real and material tension between jobs and the environment in the capitalist economy," unions can challenge this tension politically by actively reframing workers' interests and organizing with community allies for just transition policies.

However, social unionist strategies in general vary widely in their expression and forms of practice, and therefore in their effects (Ross 2008). The commitment to a social unionist collective action frame can be contradicted by the actual strategies unions take up and the extent to which expansive notions of workers' interests are concretely acted upon. Of particular interest here is the extent to which workplace- and community-based strategies are integrated or separated. In some unions, community mobilization is used as leverage to increase bargaining power in workplace negotiations, as is common in public-sector settings where the users of services ally with the workers who provide those services (Johnston 1994). The bargaining table can also be a place to negotiate gains that will benefit the broader community, such as the CAW's pursuit of working time reductions in the 1993 bargaining round with Chrysler; the union negotiated shorter shifts and restrictions on overtime, thereby creating 1,300 new jobs in Windsor, Ontario alone (Gindin 1995, 262). In these instances, unionists recognize the utility of fighting the issue on both the collective bargaining and political action fronts, which is also a strategic expression of a collective action frame based on a broader identity.

In other cases, however, social unionism is practiced fairly far from the bargaining table. Such unions may pursue alliances with community groups and take an active role in struggles over community or public policy issues, but this activity remains outside of and parallel to the labor-management relationship. Such variations in social unionism are important to note, as they have different political and ideological impacts and build different strategic capacities over time. Tattersall, for instance, shows that the extent to which unions form "deep coalitions" with community organizations and reframe their interests in broader terms affects not only the practical power of union-community alliances but also the longer-term building of trust relationships within a broader social justice movement (Tattersall 2005). Moreover, there is a fine line between a progressive form of "militant particularism," a term coined by Raymond Williams to refer to the way that social movements are generally based on "the claim that the defense and advancement of certain particular interests, properly brought together, are in fact the general interest" (Williams in Harvey 1996, 32), and sectionalist vested interests (even when pursued with the support of other community members). Finally, as Ross has argued, where social unionist commitments are kept separate "from what remains the core of union activity—collective bargaining and day-to-day servicing—and are often sacrificed when they conflict with the membership's sectional economic interests," unions' motivations are viewed with a skeptical eye (Ross 2008, 131).

For these reasons, and despite the value they clearly place on unions' expansion of their agenda to include broader social justice concerns, the Canadian public remains

unsure about unions' motivations, and many see the use of "social unionism" as a way to win support for their own narrow bargaining goals or economic interests (Canadian Labour Congress/Vector Research 2003, iv). These contradictory dynamics have become more visible and acute in the last five years, particularly in light of the intensified economic crisis. Some prominent Canadian unions have retrenched from their social unionist commitments and strategies and (re)turned to defensive struggles to protect their own memberships. While understandable, the implications of such retrenchment for long-term movement building as well as effective political campaigns need to be explored. Whether justified or not, the cynicism bred by a perceived fair-weather commitment to social unionism makes it more difficult for labor to build the kinds of coalitions necessary to win support for any kind of progressive agenda.

These contradictory dynamics are especially visible in union activity on environmental questions, particularly amongst manufacturing sector workers. Almost all of the daily activities central to the reproduction of consumerist industrial society—whether resource extraction, production, transportation, or consumption (both as the realization of value and as the social reproduction of the labor force)—are environmentally unsustainable in the long run (Leonard 2010). Most manufacturing-sector workers daily perform jobs that directly contribute to ecological problems such as climate change, and they make products that are also central to the problem. Solving the current crisis will require, amongst other things, not just the creation of a "green jobs" sector or the attraction of "green capital" to a particular community or country, but rather a thorough structural transformation of our entire economy involving new forms of production and consumption as well as new relationships between the state and the market. However, struggles for environmental sustainability challenge the very economic activities upon which manufacturing workers depend. Moreover, the fight for environmentally sustainable economic activity also implies a challenge to employers' power over investment decisions, product choice and design, the use of technology, and job creation, implicating the labor-management relationship as a terrain of environmental struggle and raising the question of what gets discussed and negotiated there. Given employers' power to shift investment in an ever-increasingly deregulated national and global economy, the risks of making "costly" environmental demands can be great, as Windsor-area CAW members learned when their mobilization with community allies to pressure Bendix Automotive to address high rates of asbestos-related cancers amongst their workforce led the employer to close the factory (Storey and Lewchuk 2000).

In addition, the tensions in the relationship between industrial unions and environmentalists are not only rooted in the approach of unions and workers. There is a long tradition of "conservationism" in the environmentalist movement, which emphasizes the preservation of pristine 'natural' spaces abstracted from the needs of human communities (Gottlieb 2002, 5-6). While much of this was challenged in the political ecology movements of the 1960s and 70s, many contemporary environmental organizations continue to advocate a "green economic transition" that glosses over the question of what livelihoods will be available to workers displaced from the wind-up of polluting industries. In their critique of the impasse of the contemporary environmental

movement on the issue of climate change, Shellenberger and Nordhaus argue that, because of their narrow definition of what constitutes an "environmental issue," environmentalists have repeatedly failed to take seriously the need to ally with the labor movement in a fight for massive investment in new and sustainable jobs. Instead, they have treated both the causes and solutions to environmental problems as technical rather than social and economic, have not recognized the strategic priority of a long-term relationship with labor, and have pursued technically perfect policy solutions "as though politics didn't matter" (Shellenberger and Nordhaus 2004, 25; see also Keil 1994, 15). Although the environmental justice movement focuses on the way that environmental harms in communities are unequally distributed and experienced according to class and racial hierarchies, mainstream (and often middle-class) environmental activists have generally failed to adopt a class analysis of the structures which (re)produce environmental degradation, and have underemphasized workers' right to decent work and secure and sustainable livelihoods in any economic/environmental transition (Keil 1994; Adkin 1998; Storey 2004). Some of these contradictions over conflicting class interests and different notions of justice can be observed inside environmental movement organizations themselves. For instance, when its Toronto-area employees—some of whom had come from the union occupational health-and-safety movement—attempted to organize a staff union in 1992-1993, Greenpeace "harassed and laid off" key union organizers and supporters and paid over \$100,000 to antiunion law firm Mathews, Dinsdale, and Clark[2] to argue Greenpeace's case at the Ontario Labour Relations Board (Harter 2004; also Gray 2004, par. 74; Keil 1994). Harter argues that such "anti-working-class radicalism" is rooted in the class interests and world-view of the professional-managerial class that makes up a significant proportion of the environmental movement's social base (Harter 2004, 88-89). While the labor movement may not have done enough self-examination of its conflicting interests on environmental issues, the environmental movement's assumptions about the kinds of interests that must be prioritized have also made it hard to create sustainable alliances for mutual benefit.

As a result, historic tensions have existed between unions and environmental activist organizations. These have at times appeared surmountable, as with the fabled Teamster-Turtle Alliance at the anti-World Trade Organization protests in Seattle in 1999 (although this relationship was clearly ephemeral, as evidenced by the Teamsters' support for increased oil production via drilling in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Preserve only two years later[3]) (Ness 2003, 54). The above-named "green jobs" coalitions also represent renewed attempts to overcome the legacy of these divisions and push for the creation of jobs in new industries such as renewable energy and environmentally sustainable consumer products. However, most industrial unions remain tightly imbricated in the basic framework of the Fordist industrial economy and traditional labor-management relations. When also faced with the intense and immediate pressures of job loss due to economic and sectoral crises, it is difficult even for committed social unionists to adequately come to grips with the pressing needs for change that are identified by environmentalists.

Autoworkers, Automobility, Fordism, and the Environment

Autoworkers and their unions illuminate the tensions in the relationship between environmental and labor politics and the challenges of developing effective forms of environmental social unionism. Understanding the potentials and limits of this segment of the working class is of particular strategic importance. Historically, they have represented a large segment of the industrial working class, been particularly effective in collective bargaining, and played an important role in the development of the postwar North American labor movement. But also of key importance is the nature of the product that their labor produces. The car is not just any consumer product: it occupies a central role in the North American economy and culture.

This centrality is first indicated by the very name given to the postwar arrangement of productive forces, industrial relations, and distribution of surplus value: Fordism (Lipietz 1987). As a result, autoworkers' unions were amongst the most powerful in collective bargaining terms, and were also paradigmatic, setting the framework in both Canada and the United States for what a strong and militant union could and should achieve for the working class. The 1950 "Treaty of Detroit" between the UAW and the three Detroit automakers set the pattern for stable postwar labor-management relations, entrenching the expectation of continuous improvements in workers' wages and benefits in exchange for "responsible unionism" and participation in employer efforts to increase productivity (Davis 1986, 52). The strategic capacity of North American auto workers to bargain effectively created the material basis for a new kind of working-class life in which, for the first time in history, significant numbers of people holding working-class jobs could consume like their middle-class counterparts. Indeed, according to David Harvey, the revolutionary element in Ford's vision was not the moving assembly line on its own, but rather "his explicit recognition that mass production meant mass consumption, a new system of the reproduction of labour power, a new politics of labour control and management, a new aesthetics and psychology" (Harvey 1989, 125-26). In other words, the working class was to assume a new role in keeping that economic engine going, on the basis of collectively bargained higher wages, stable and "respectable" lives, home and car ownership, and mass consumption. In this, the organization of the production of the automobile has been central to the postwar structure of class relations.

But the impact of auto work was not merely economic. The expanding ownership of private automobiles reorganized urban geographies, transforming transportation networks from public forms to private automotive ones. Responding to both landowners and developers seeking to increase the value of suburban property via expansion of transportation and other infrastructure, municipal planning and other government policies facilitated the growing spatial distance between places of living and working, connected to each other by ever-larger thoroughfares (Gonzalez 2005). Postwar suburbanization and the car went hand in hand (Sheller and Urry 2000). The same process was repeated at the national level, as highways were built to support private travel between cities instead of public travel on railways (Seiler 2008). Processes of daily

social reproduction also came to be mediated by automobile use, as the distance to schools, community centers, and shopping malls grew and made private car ownership "essential." The 1950s and 60s witnessed the tearing up of alternative and collective transit infrastructure such as streetcars and its replacement with expressways and wide streets, and the destruction of old downtowns and central shopping streets to which everyone walked and around which they organized their social life (Flink 1990, 359-73; Paterson 2007, 42-45, 72-74, 114-19). In this new universe, autoworkers were producing an essential, "modern" commodity.

In tandem with the reorganization of the urban spaces that shaped social life for a growing majority of North Americans, the cultural and symbolic importance of the automobile must also be acknowledged as an important factor shaping the politics of autoworkers. The car has come to mean much more than the practical ability to travel between home, work, and the shopping mall. People have an intensely personal relationship with their cars as means of recreation, rites of passage into adulthood, locations for entertainment, expressions of identity, and embodiments of freedom, power, masculinity, and security. This indicates the extent to which our entire society, materially and culturally, is designed around the car (Sachs 1984; Freund and Martin 1993). In the popular imagination, private vehicles provide the ability to assert one's individual power in the chaos of late capitalist society, as experienced by commuting workers in the form of crowded expressways (Seiler 2008). Ownership of a first car and the acquisition of the necessary license to drive it marks a passage into adulthood for many.

Moreover, automobility as a dominant form of subjectivity has not emerged spontaneously, as a "natural" byproduct of its economic value as a commodity. Rather, as Featherstone (2004, 1) says, "There is a powerful socio-economic and technological complex at work sustaining the car." And as Urry (2004, 27) argues, "[a]utomobility can be conceptualized as a self-organizing autopoietic, nonlinear system that spreads world-wide, and includes cars, car-drivers, roads, petroleum supplies and many novel objects, technologies and signs. The system generates the preconditions for its own self-expansion" For instance, the sense of masculine physical power represented by oversized luxury trucks (known as "Sport Utility Vehicles") or overpowered "muscle cars" is clear in the symbolism used by televised commercials (McLean 2009). The automobile is also one of the most heavily advertised products in the marketplace—both on television and in all forms of print media—and the nature of that advertising plays a crucial role in shaping the nature of the demand expressed and the size of the vehicles most commonly purchased (Gunster 2004).

In other words, the car is one of our most valuable objects, economically, technologically, symbolically, culturally, and emotionally. In that sense, as an ideology that naturalizes the car, automobility is supremely successful. This condition of automobility affects all North Americans, most of whom are dependent on cars to move around even if they conclude that the benefits of such mobility are outweighed by its costs: of time and money involved in insurance, parking, traffic jams, maintenance and fuel, risks to personal safety, and the socialized costs of road construction and repair and the

vast infrastructure supporting automobile use (Gorz 1983; Beckmann 2001). Despite these costs, however, it is generally taken for granted that cars are simply part of modern life, and most people remain convinced that cars are an important part of what makes them full members of society.

While this acceptance of the car and its incorporation into personal identity cuts across class lines (Seiler 2008), such identification is prevalent amongst the workers who produce these economically and culturally significant objects. Workers' individual and collective identities are shaped in important ways by the structure and content of their occupations, and are often rooted in claims about the nature and social significance of their work. The need to frame one's work as socially meaningful or requiring valuable qualities from workers is especially acute in those occupations which society has stigmatized as "dirty" or low status (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999). This dynamic is evident amongst industrial workers in Taylorized industries like auto, where workers' skill, autonomy, and discretion are minimized (Rinehart 2005), work is physically demanding yet mind-numbingly repetitive (Hamper 1992), and assumptions about the "overpaid" status of such workers are widespread (Gohier 2008). It is well established that the major compensation for accepting alienated labor under the Fordist mass-production system was higher wages than "normal" for such deskilled work, initially as the Five-Dollar Day and later as the norm established in the Treaty of Detroit that autoworkers would bargain progressively higher wages in exchange for their participation in ever-increasing productivity (Gindin 1995). Others have explored the way that both management and union mobilized notions of masculinity, providing both another layer of psychic compensation for alienating work and the basis for a militant, oppositional collective identity (Collinson 1992; Lewchuk 1993, Yates 1998). A less commonly acknowledged compensation is the social esteem derived from the production of goods consumed and used daily by nearly everyone, and which are the focus of such positive cultural attention. Like craftworkers of an earlier era who proudly marched with the products of their labor, many autoworkers actively participate in "car culture" as enthusiastic collectors, and Windsor, Ontario's Labour Day celebrations regularly feature not only the typical speeches from labor leaders and politicians, but also a much-anticipated car show (WDLC 2008). Similarly, AutoWorker.net, an independent, member-driven online discussion space for autoworkers and others interested in the CAW, features a significant space for "Auto News" in which members both dissect the fortunes of the industry and debate the merits of various new models (as both producers and consumers).

As such, postwar capitalist society produced not only these commodities but also a certain kind of worker-consumer, illustrating perfectly Gramsci's point that "the new methods of [Fordist] work are inseparable from a specific mode of living and of thinking and feeling life" For Gramsci, this "American phenomenon" was "the biggest collective effort to date to create, . . . with consciousness of purpose unmatched in history, a new type of worker and of man" (Gramsci 1971, 302). Both Ford and Taylor were explicit on this point. For Taylor, the "product of a factory is not materials, but men" (quoted in Seiler 2008, 27). Similarly, according to Samuel S. Marquis, Director

of Ford's Sociology Department, "Mr. Ford's business is the making of men, and he manufactures automobiles on the side to defray the expenses of his main business" (quoted in Lewchuk 1993, 824). The process of capital accumulation thus organizes the patterns of both productive and reproductive labor, of material and emotional life inside and outside the workplace.

This cultural condition of automobility in its various facets is the ideological terrain on which both the debate over the car's role in climate change and the strategic responses of North American autoworker unions plays out. The automobile is undeniably central as a key contributor to global warming. According to some estimates, private car and truck use is responsible for 10 percent of the world's carbon dioxide emissions (Environmental Defense 2006, iv). In the United States, emissions from cars and trucks represent substantially more than those from the electric utilities, the main consumer of coal. Most scientists insist that preventing global warming will require the nearly complete elimination of fossil fuel use (IPCC 2007; Monbiot 2007). Thus, debates over solutions to global warming increasingly and inevitably involve discussion of ways to diminish reliance on the private gasoline-powered automobile as a mode of transportation. This will entail ending production of most of the vehicles currently produced by autoworkers, and reconverting the transportation system from one based on personal use of fossil-fuel burning cars back to one based on some other technology, such as fully electric vehicles, which may be only feasible in the form of public transit. However, the economic, infrastructural, and cultural dimensions of automobility create enormous obstacles to such change for both policy makers and autoworker unions.

The CAW: Finding the Right Balance?

The CAW thus finds itself at the intersection of several important political tensions. In the absence of a just transition strategy, there is at present a clear conflict between the vested interests of the auto-industry membership in defending their existing (and increasingly scarce) jobs and the global ecological interest in averting catastrophic climate change by transforming the industry in which they work, the transportation system, and the urban infrastructure built around it. This conflict manifests itself within the union as a tension between the form of social unionism deployed as an external political strategy on important but relatively safe community issues and a different approach that involves building alliances with other movements not only to influence government policy, but also to transform the economic activity of employers through community pressure and struggles within the collective bargaining process. This conflict is also visible at the level of autoworkers' collective identity, between, on the one hand, an explicit identification with the broader Canadian working class and, on the other, an identity rooted in the particularities of autoworkers' occupational and union culture—and the presupposition of automobility embedded in it. The political contradictions generated by such conflicts are evident in the CAW's approach to environmental social unionism in general, and to climate change in particular. Given that the

CAW has historically possessed a broader vision, a more social unionist orientation, and more critical approach to policy questions than many other unions in Canada, it is instructive to examine the ways that their response to these challenges has evolved. If the CAW is unable to navigate these challenges effectively way, then prospects for unions who have weaker attachments to social unionism of any kind are doubtful. There are important lessons to learn from the "leader" of social unionism amongst the Canadian private sector unions.

The CAW's social unionism has its historical roots in the UAW, but has also developed in a uniquely Canadian direction. Walter Reuther, UAW president from 1946 until his death in 1970, believed the labor movement should be committed to more than "a nickel-in-the-pay-envelope kind of philosophy." Instead, he argued,

> . . . [w]e are building a labor movement, not to patch up the old world so you can starve less often and less severely; we are building the kind of labor movement that will remake the world so that the working people will get the benefits of their labor." (Reuther 1947, 4-5)

Reuther identified with the reformism of postwar social democracy (including its anti-communist face), working at times to create a political-party formation that would represent this current in American electoral politics. He also believed strongly in union engagement in all aspects of community life, including civil rights struggles, consumer issues, leisure, and sports (Lichtenstein 1995; Gindin 1995). Continuity with this version of social unionism is evident in the CAW's many community-based campaigns and involvements.

In 1985, when they split from the UAW due to differences over bargaining strategy, the issue of concessions, and questions of Canadian autonomy,[4] Canadian autoworkers chose to not only restate this commitment to social unionism but also entrench it in the Statement of Principles that forms the preamble of the CAW Constitution, adopted at the founding convention in September 1985. Their rationale for social unionism is that, "[i]n our society, private corporations control the workplace and set the framework for all employees. By way of this economic power, they influence the laws, policies, and ideas of society" (CAW 2009a, 1). The power of capital over more than just the workplace and workers' economic lives therefore requires that unions take up broader forms of action:

> Our collective bargaining strength is based on our internal organization and mobilization, but it is also influenced by the more general climate around us: laws, policies, the economy, and social attitudes. Furthermore, our lives extend beyond collective bargaining and the workplace and we must concern ourselves with issues like housing, taxation, education, medical services, the environment, the international economy. Social unionism means unionism which is rooted in the workplace but understands the importance of participating in, and influencing, the general direction of society (CAW 2009a, 1-2).

This commitment to social unionism, understood as an engagement on issues beyond the workplace, and an allegiance to the welfare of the working class more generally, provided one basis for the creation of union environment committees at the local level. Local and national environment committees were "reactivated" in 1986 by a national leadership keen to see the union "play a high profile political role" on the crucial issues of the day; environmental standing committees were made a constitutional requirement for all locals (Adkin 1998, 231; see also CAW 2009b, 111). At the same time, local activists were also taking up the environmental question in their communities, both as a response to industrial pollution, occupational health and safety problems, higher local cancer rates, and job loss (as discussed below). Environmental activism inspired by these first formative years of the newly independent union was characterized by a broader understanding of the interests the union was defending, a recognition that economic and political strategies challenging auto employers should be combined, and that some of the underlying assumptions of automobility needed to be questioned.

Many of the union's policy statements have recognized the need to rethink the structure of the transportation industry itself, the dominance of the private automobile, and the negative impact an "unreconstructed" industry will have on autoworker livelihoods. The 1991 National Convention adopted a policy statement that problematized the product CAW autoworkers produce, and grounded that critique in a broad social unionist ethos:

> Autoworkers are also citizens, have families and live in communities. We care about the social impact of the car, about the air we breathe and the kind of world we leave for our children. We called on the companies to begin to develop light, energy efficient, non-polluting, and safe vehicles more than forty years ago (1948) but the companies rejected this advice with the argument that such decisions were none of our business and would remain profit and market driven. In the 1970's we joined others in endorsing the need for more investment in public transit as a rational way to expand consumer options and better balance our transportation system (CAW 1991, cited in De Carlo 2001).

In the 2001 Statement on Transportation and the Environment, the union argued that public transit had to be expanded along with a more fundamental transformation of the urban environment:

> We need to redesign our cities so that we live closer to where we work and shop. We need to increase urban density to build real communities, not bedroom communities. We need to be able to walk or cycle safely where we want to go. We need to ensure that public transit is plentiful and cheap. Taxation used to support public transit should not be seen as a subsidy but an investment in building the community, the urban environment and urban planning (CAW 2001).

Finally, in 2005, the CAW Health, Safety, and Environment Department's review of the union's first twenty years recognized the need for transportation-sector workers not only to mobilize for public policies supporting new transportation policies, but also to bargain over *what* they produce, to "bargain the right to produce green cars with lower to zero emissions, (hybrid and ultimately fuel cell), the right to produce hybrid and fuel cell locomotives, subways, buses and trucks" (CAW 2005, 15).

The CAW has attempted to use its bargaining power around several environmental initiatives with the Big Three. In 2002, the CAW included in its bargaining proposals a requirement that the industry eliminate the use of mercury in the production of cars. This was described by one of the negotiators as "a large step as far as where we're going as a socially conscious union" (CBC News 2002). This proposal likely evolved out of the CAW's membership (since 1987) in Great Lakes United (GLU), a Canadian-U.S. activist coalition working to preserve water quality in the region where most of the Canadian auto industry has been located (Adkin 1998, 257). In 2001, GLU, in conjunction with university-based researchers, issued a report documenting the level of mercury in the Lakes and the contribution of motor vehicle scrap to this problem (Ecology Center et. al. 2001). This successful proposal[5] expanded into the CAW's broader (but as-yet unsuccessful) fight for Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), to make auto manufacturers responsible for the environmentally safe disposal of vehicles and the reuse or recycling of components and materials where possible (Hargrove 2004a). Linked to this was the successful negotiation in 2002 of workplace environment representatives to spearhead recycling initiatives and conduct workplace environmental audits on the health and safety model (CAW 2002b, 15).

The CAW's environmental social unionism has also been evident in their recognition of the links between worker health, community health, and the ecological implications of employer practices. For instance, in the 1980s, some CAW activists allied with residents living near the Ford Foundry in Windsor to organize opposition to the foundry's toxic emissions and their effect on the community's physical health (Adkin 1998, 263-64). Similarly, when it was discovered that a coworker had been diagnosed with a rare, asbestos-related cancer, workers at Windsor's Bendix Automotive embarked on a five-year public pressure campaign to force the employer to improve health-and-safety protections and remove asbestos from the brake-production process (Storey and Lewchuk 2000). Both campaigns represent forms of "working-class environmentalism" discussed by Keil, as well as environmental justice politics that challenge placing the burden of corporate pollution on working-class families and neighborhoods.

A more radical attempt to secure both economically and environmentally sustainable jobs, remove the power of private employers over job creation and investment decisions, and make collective and publicly accountable decisions about production was the Green Work Alliance. This coalition between CAW locals in Mississauga and Brampton, Greenpeace, the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, and other Toronto-area environmentalists and antipoverty activists emerged in the aftermath of the rash of plant closures that followed the advent of the U.S.-Canada Free Trade Agreement in

1989. In particular, the closure and occupation of Caterpillar's Brampton, Ontario agricultural machinery plant in 1991 prompted the formation of the GWA, whose goal was conversion of shuttered plants to production of ecologically sustainable manufactured goods, thereby replacing lost jobs, preserving skills, and linking plants to the social needs of the broader community (Keil 1994, 19-23). The proposal included extensive forms of workers' control—workers would design and build the goods and participate with community members in democratic decision making over the plant's operation—as well as public financing through a combination of public revenue and taxation on finance industries (De Carlo 2001; Keil 1994, 21-22). The GWA was inspired by similar initiatives elsewhere, such as the eight-year occupation of a Japanese Toshiba plant, which forced the formation of a workers' cooperative and the union-proposed Lucas Plan from the mid-1970s for the conversion of military arms production to socially useful goods in the UK (Wainwright and Elliott 1982). In that sense, the GWA was challenging the dominance of private capital over investment and job-creation decisions and insisting that workers and the public's interests converged around economically and environmentally sustainable forms of employment.

Despite the potential of these impressive initiatives to develop into a more fulsome version of social unionism, there have also always been contradictions in the CAW's environmental politics. First, as is to be expected, the level of commitment to environmental goals varies across locals. Some CAW locals—and individual activists within those locals—have pursued environmental issues more vigorously than others, and have created regional networks such as with the Windsor Regional Environmental Council (WREC) in which environment committee activists from several different locals work together (Adkin 1998). However, in some instances, the closer the issues potentially impinged on a local's relationship with management and might require the local to demand changes to production that might risk jobs, the less likely union locals are to make union-community mobilization around their employer's impact on the community a strategy priority. This was evident in the Windsor CAW's debates over the union's appropriate response to the Ford Foundry issue. While activists from Local 444 (at Chrysler) were quite active and militant on the issue, Ford Local 200's Environment Committee and local leadership did not participate in the community coalition on the issue and did not appear to prioritize pressuring the company to deal with the pollution problem (Adkin 1998, 263-66).

Perhaps in order to maintain unity amongst locals, the emphasis of regional environment councils seems to have evolved away from challenging their own employers. Instead, these committees and networks engage CAW members in community-based environmental projects, such as waste reduction, water quality, environmental education in local schools, as well as raising awareness about higher than average cancer rates in industrial communities (CAW WREC n.d.). However laudable, these environmental campaigns remain primarily outside the bargaining process, the labor-management relationship, and the nature of auto work itself. This reluctance to engage in any challenge to the employers' environmentally unsustainable investment and production decisions may have been a pragmatic and reasonable strategic choice to deal with

issues such as those listed above, but they also sidestep some of the most difficult issues about the sustainability of auto workers' own jobs.

Moreover, while the National Office supported local environmental initiatives like those discussed above, some union activists argue they never made them a core strategic priority (Adkin 1998). This marginalization of the environment at a union-wide level can first be gleaned from the CAW's Campaigns and Issues webpage: of the fifteen current and nine past campaigns, not one has the environment or climate change as a primary focus (CAW n.d.). The seeds of these limits can be seen in the way the issue is framed in the CAW's *Statement of Principles: Environment*. While they recognize the importance of autoworkers' unions taking a position on environmental questions, given that "[e]missions of noxious pollutants from cars and trucks—hydrocarbons, carbon dioxide and carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxide and sulphur oxide—have helped to create unhealthy cities, acid rain, the greenhouse effect and the depletion of the ozone layer," any "environmentally sound" transportation policy cannot

> . . . lead to the destruction of the transportation industry. We support high emission control standards to limit pollutants emitted by automobiles. By taking a stand for a cleaner environment through tougher controls on our employers, we reject the blackmail of choosing job security over the environment (CAW 2007d, par. 4).

However, when confronted with exactly such choices, particularly as job losses in the sector have mounted since 2005, the CAW has found it difficult to uphold this commitment to "jobs *and* the environment" and has increasingly succumbed to the "jobs versus the environment" logic. Not only does this reveal a limit on the nature of the union's social unionism, but also an acceptance of the basic terms of automobility and the current transportation system. This shift became most visible in 2007, in the CAW's substantial policy statement *Climate Change and our Jobs: Finding the Right Balance.* In it, the CAW defends the Detroit automakers' decisions to produce larger than average (and thus less fuel efficient) vehicles in Canadian plants, instead of insisting on the production of dramatically greener vehicles. The document does not propose the possibility of the provincial and federal governments requiring the production of greener vehicles as a criterion for subsidies (which, after the crisis of 2008, could have been included in bailout packages). Instead, the CAW "exposes" the hybrid vehicles produced by Japanese automakers (including the highest fuel economy vehicle on the market at the time) as less environmentally friendly than is claimed (CAW 2007a, 16). In other words, the document does not challenge employers' profit-making strategy based on the current vehicle mix, and proposes solutions to global warming that take for granted the existing structure of the industry.

This policy paper must be understood in the context of huge auto-sector job losses since 2005 and the union's significant investment of both financial and activist resources in the 2007 "Made in Canada Matters" campaign as the centerpiece of the union's political action strategy to preserve jobs. However, when applied to the

Canadian auto sector, "Made in Canada Matters" meant exhorting Canadians to buy Detroit-industry vehicles with relatively poor fuel economy. Indeed, in their submissions to the parliamentary committee hearings on Bill C-30, the *Clean Air Act*, the CAW leadership defended the current structure of the Canadian auto industry and its products:

> [o]ur industry is unlike any other country's auto industry. Canadian production is fully integrated with the much larger U.S. and the products we produce—for both historical reasons[6] and current cost structures—are larger vehicles. These include minivans, crossover SUV's, pickup trucks and large cars, the vast majority of which are shipped to the U.S. Two-thirds of the 2.5 million vehicles built in Canada in 2006 were in the largest categories and more than 80% of the engines built here are 8 cylinders (CAW 2007b, 3).

However, rather than problematizing these decisions and the long-term risk to autoworker jobs that such a product mix poses, the CAW's submission advocates for global warming policies that preserve the industry's current structure and limit regulatory responses that might threaten auto-sector jobs. For instance, environmentalists and climate activists have long sought regulated standards for the fuel efficiency of vehicles sold in North America. California took the first steps to impose ever-increasing fuel efficiency standards, and their approach has generally shaped policies adopted in other North American jurisdictions. These "Corporate Average Fuel Efficiency" (CAFE) standards require automakers to reduce the average fuel efficiency of *all* the vehicles they sell in order to have access to a given market. The CAW's position is to reject a CAFE-style standard, since this would increase the cost of larger classes of vehicles and provide a disincentive to their purchase, while promoting the sale of smaller vehicles, which CAW members do not produce. Instead of fleet-wide fuel efficiency standards, the CAW advocates class-specific standards that are "set at a level and structured in such a way that supports and drives technological and fuel economy improvements in all of these product groups" (CAW 2007a, 3). In other words, the CAW opposes regulations that would require the production of more fuel-efficient kinds of vehicles in Canada in favor of preserving the current focus on large vehicles as long as their relative fuel efficiency is improved. In this they have followed their U.S. counterpart, the UAW, which in 2001 moved away from its initial support of CAFE standards to line up with manufacturers that were predicting massive job losses due to the negative impact fleet-wide standards would have on the SUV market (Obach 2004, 70-71; UAW 2008).[7] This position also takes for granted that the nature of demand for types of vehicles is fixed, and that private industry must be allowed to fill such demand.

The union's defense of the industry has not been framed in merely pragmatic terms, however. Statements by the union and its leaders have also mobilized ideas of automobility, and the "naturalness" and immutability of consumers' attachment to private automobiles in general, and large vehicles in particular. Such ideas have been

especially promoted by the union's former National President, Buzz Hargrove. In a 2007 speech to the CAW's Canadian Council, Hargrove defended looser fuel economy standards in Canada by invoking a particular image of North American family life:

> You can't say to people you can't buy, you can't put penalties on people that want big vehicles who have big families, that have kids in hockey, and basketball, and want to travel a country as large as Canada or the United States by car. You've got to be able to have the vehicles and that is the only way this can happen (Hargrove 2007a, 15).

In *Climate Change and Our Jobs*, the union defends the "sovereign consumer" and the primacy of their right to choose over the need to regulate either production or consumption. They acknowledge that while "[i]t is much better, for example, to use mass public transit in high-density urban settings, than to rely mostly on private cars for urban transportation . . . people will clearly continue to want to drive vehicles" (CAW 2007a, 14).

In an op-ed entitled "Green Cars Can Come in Big Packages," Hargrove invokes notions of comfort and their centrality to consumers' vehicle choices:

> While a few green-minded consumers may pry themselves into a Chevrolet Aveo or a Toyota Echo, most will not. And if consumers come to equate a "green car" with a very small car our environmental progress will be stopped in its tracks (Hargrove 2004, FP15).

He elaborates by admitting that,

> . . . [y]es, smaller vehicles tend to get better gas mileage. But this must be balanced against the concrete needs of most Canadian drivers for larger vehicles—whether for work, family, or comfort. Minivans, pickups, and SUVs now account for half of all vehicles on the road; many are used for work or commercial purposes. A minivan is a fuel-efficient way to transport a whole family. And contrary to their stereotype as nature-bashing egomaniacs, most SUV drivers view their vehicles as modern-day station wagons (Hargrove 2004, FP15).

Finally, in an opinion piece entitled "Kyoto Impossible," Hargrove bluntly "reject[ed] the proposition that reducing our environmental footprint means we must drive small vehicles or get rid of cars altogether"[8] (Hargrove 2007b, FP15). The underlying logic of automobility throughout is clear: people "need" to be comfortable; drivers are accustomed to SUVs; therefore, autoworkers cannot be expected to press their employers to build smaller, more fuel-efficient cars. Ecological concerns are simply a lower priority. As Hargrove again put it: "The environment, I repeat, is important, but our members' jobs are much more important to me" (Hargrove 2007b, 15).

In the context of manufacturing job loss and like many other industrial unions, and alongside these defensive strategies, the CAW has sought to combine their members' material needs with an ecological transformation of the economy by reviving "green jobs" campaigns broadly resembling elements of the Green Work Alliance of the early 1990s. The CAW's green jobs proposals seek to both "green" the Canadian auto industry and create a distinct "green jobs" economic sector to which displaced auto workers could transition. The first strategy is expressed in a fact sheet circulated at the 2007 CAW convention, *The Auto Industry and Climate Change*, which (along with the weak fuel-efficiency standards discussed above) calls for subsidies to companies producing higher-efficiency components, standards on clean fuels, and

> . . . a government-business-labour joint initiative to demonstrate the feasibility of a new small-car assembly plant in Canada. The CAW's innovative proposal for a new Ford small-car assembly plant in St. Thomas, Ontario could be the basis for this type of project (CAW 2007c).[9]

Similarly, the CAW's Windsor Regional Environment Council launched a Green Jobs Campaign in 2010 that includes ideas for Ford, GM, and Chrysler to build "efficient engines . . . efficient transmissions and components . . . and hybrid, clean diesel, biofuel (ethanol and soy) and, eventually, electric and hydrogen fuel cell vehicles" (CAW WREC 2010, par. 4). The second strategy calls for the expansion of "non-auto Green Jobs" understood as "sustainable energy production and green products" (CAW WREC 2010, par. 5). Notably, CAW WREC explicitly acknowledges the unsustainability of the current economy as well as the "broader long term goal of Economic Conversion" (CAW WREC 2010, par. 8). Since 2009, CAW Local 112, representing DeHavilland aircraft workers, has been participating in a "green" antipoverty coalition in the Jane-Finch neighborhood of Toronto, campaigning for publicly funded green jobs and training to transform this economically marginalized community (CAW 2009b).

However, some of these campaigns also differ from those of the early 1990s in several important respects that highlight changes, both ideological and strategic, in the CAW's environmental social unionism. First, the CAW leadership and some local activists have opted to ally with capital and local economic development commissions rather than national or local environmental organizations, as in the Windsor CAW's participation in the Green Collar Jobs Coalition (which includes no other environmental activist organizations) (WEDC/AIM PowerGen Corporation 2008). While these campaigns seek economic conversion, they accept that private (albeit "green") capital is essential, that government's role is to "attract" such capital via incentives rather than replace it via public or community ownership, and that the market economy will provide the underlying framework for allocating investment and jobs. Moreover, they do not seek to mobilize either community, political, or regulatory pressure on existing employers to limit the either the economically or environmentally negative consequences of their decisions, as did the GWA. Instead, the CAW has distanced itself

from the Canadian environmental movement in recent years, and has been slow to recreate alliances with environmental groups to push for green job creation and economic transformation. The national leadership's reluctance was vividly expressed in 2007 by Hargrove, who argued that the environmental movement was working against the interests of autoworkers. In the context of the 2007 federal election, Hargrove was "infuriated" by environmentalists seeking stricter fuel economy standards on vehicles (and the politicians who "chase" their votes), publicly stating that "[w]e stand to lose 150,000 jobs in our auto industry if the insanity of this environmental movement is allowed to continue" (quoted in Van der Doelen 2007).

The shift away from mobilizational strategies in alliance with environmentalists should also be understood in the broader context of the CAW's growing isolation from the Canadian left and its alliance, pragmatic or otherwise, with centrist parties. In 2003, the CAW was expelled from the Ontario Federation of Labour over the former's advocacy of strategic voting to block re-election of the Conservatives in the 1999 and 2003 Ontario provincial elections.[10] This rankled those affiliates who were staunch supporters of the New Democratic Party since, in practical terms, this strategy meant encouraging CAW members to vote for the Liberal Party in many ridings. In 2006, then-CAW president Buzz Hargrove was expelled from the New Democratic Party for his advocacy of strategic voting at the Federal level, and the CAW retaliated by withdrawing from formal participation in the Party. In 2007, Hargrove publicly praised centrist Liberal premier Dalton McGuinty's commitment to the auto industry (and in particular to providing subsidies to the Big Three) and invited him to speak at the union's national convention (Campbell 2007). This break has reinforced the CAW's "go it alone" mentality, and keeps them outside debates on the left over sustainable economic strategies.

These contradictory approaches to the jobs/environment question reflect important tensions within the CAW's practice of social unionism. Since the 2000s, the union has kept environmental issues separate from "core" bargaining issues, or at least contained them in ways that don't challenge their employers in a fundamental way. This approach avoids exploring the way that the broader/long-term interests of both union and community members are increasingly in conflict with the narrow preservation of jobs in the industry as currently organized. Social unionist causes like the environment are for members to engage with away from the bargaining table, in the community, in ways that don't disturb the underlying industrial structure or challenge the employers' unilateral right to make investment decisions. Bargaining maintains its traditional focus, while leaving unexamined the increasingly unsustainable nature of North American auto production and reflecting the dominant "common sense" that somehow the economy can be understood as separate from the environment that makes it possible. This sectionalism both limits the application of social unionism and prevents the union from advocating for and mobilizing around an economic conversion model for the auto industry. These tensions are compounded by both the conjunctural and long-term decline in auto-industry employment, the union leadership's growing identification with the interests of auto sector employers, and the national leadership's deployment of the dominant ideology of automobility.

That said, shifting demographics may provide the basis for a rethinking of the union's attachment to the auto industry and its current structure. As of 2009, workers in the vehicle manufacturing sector comprised 82,000 of the union's 225,000-strong membership, just over 36 percent. This reality is in part the result of job losses, but also of a wave of amalgamations since the CAW's formation in 1985, as many smaller, left nationalist and historically militant Canadian unions were drawn to the new union's stance on concession bargaining and Canadian independence (Gindin 1995, 231-39; Yates 1998). Moreover, of those eighty-two thousand, twelve thousand of them are in "speciality vehicles" including public transit vehicles (CAW 2008). In other words, there are members of the union whose livelihoods would be directly and positively affected by a turn to collective forms of transportation. CAW members who produce railway cars and buses have the potential to take more leadership in the union, creating pressure for a more consistent position on a sustainable economic transition. However, these elements of the membership remain a minority and are fragmented over many economic sectors with their own corporative interests. The national leadership is still closely identified with the bread-and-butter concerns of autoworkers, who retain both material and moral authority within the union. Moreover, as we argued above, other CAW members are also subject to the same generalized cultural and material pressures of automobility, and though they may be critical of the short-termism of current union strategy on the climate change issue, they also have pragmatic interests in the survival of the union's largest membership component, upon whom the financial health of the union rests. As Yates argues, the process of reconstituting the basis of the union's collective identity in the aftermath of mergers is difficult and dislocating (Yates 1998), and it remains to be seen how these new forces will influence the overall direction of the union.

Conclusions

The Canadian Auto Workers' approach to environmental issues in general, and global warming in particular, has become increasingly contradictory as the economic crisis of the North American auto industry deepens. Despite a serious commitment amongst sections of the membership to social unionism of the broadest kind that attempts to grapple with ecological crises and their own industry's involvement in it, the leadership of the union has adopted an approach that subordinates those questions to the short-term job security interests of auto-assembly and parts workers. The CAW unquestionably finds itself in an exceptionally difficult situation, and its room to maneuver at present is extremely limited. But avoiding confronting the sustainability of the auto industry and the structure of automobility around which much of our society's activity is organized will only weaken the union in the long term, since the problem of global warming (and the climate crisis it is creating) will only worsen and the issue will remain important for progressive activists. The just transition that the union rightfully calls for will not emerge without the development of the political capacity to demand it. As long as the CAW devotes its energy to finding ways to preserve existing jobs, it

will be unable to develop a strategy for moving away from the current, unsustainable structure of industry on terms favorable to their members. As long as those voices within the union pressing for a more fundamental rethink of the CAW's interests and political strategies remain unable to shape the union's priorities, the future holds little promise for auto workers.

All of this speaks to the dilemmas of social unionism as a concrete political practice. The political commitment to progressive social change that benefits the broader working class is shaped by both pragmatic material pressures and the particularities of workers' identities and therefore conceptions of their interests. Collective action frames are not abstract commitments; they emerge out of the concrete conditions of workers who attempt to connect the particular nature of their position in the capitalist economy with the more general condition of other workers. Social unionists must thus engage in a delicate process of negotiating and connecting particular and universal identities and expressing these in strategic ways. However, these identities and interests cannot always be made to fit together harmoniously. As a result, the particular way that the core bargaining function of the union is related to its broader social and political goals has important political consequences; "social unionism" as a label for a union's political orientation is not sufficient to understand the nature, potentials, and limitations of its political practice. The CAW's form of social unionism recognizes and values community interests, or the interests of the working class more broadly, but usually only outside the bargaining process, and only when they do not conflict with the interests of employers. Thus, the union is called upon to work in a coalition of interests to press for the kinds of changes that would protect all workers from the unsustainable actions of employers. In the case of global warming, a social unionist strategy to demand public investment specifically tied to requirements for the production of more ecologically sustainable vehicles could be integrated into a bargaining agenda for greener production. Such a strategy would serve not only to foster unity amongst various progressive social forces, but also more effectively defend CAW members' long-term interests than the current approach of protecting jobs building big cars. This would also require the union's leadership to play a very active role in fleshing out a different collective action frame premised on different notions of autoworker interests and identities.

Some may argue that such advice comes too late, or is impractical in the current crisis in the auto sector, as evidenced by the CAW's acceptance of economic concessions in the last several rounds of bargaining in order to preserve jobs. According to this logic, the union is not in a position to make demands on employers of any kind, even if they wanted to. However, this raises the question of when it might have been possible for the union to prioritize such demands. When the auto industry and autoworker jobs were expanding, as in the early 2000s, the CAW might have had the bargaining power and the mobilizational capacity to fight for changes to the jobs done and vehicles produced by their members. They might have been able to build moral authority as a leader in the movement demanding a transition to better, healthier, and more sustainable jobs. That they did not do so indicates that, even in good times, the

CAW's social unionism was limited by their inability to act on a broader conception of their members' economic interests in the realm of collective bargaining itself. Despite antisectionalist political commitments, the CAW's concrete strategies are infused with sectionalist notions of members' interests, separated from our shared interests as workers, or even as citizens of the planet.

Given the historic importance of the CAW's political orientation and interventions within the Canadian labor movement, the union's inability to define their members' interests in terms that also speak effectively to the broader environmental movement is a serious obstacle to an effective political challenge to the forces that benefit most from the activity that generates global warming. The kinds of social transformations that will be required to solve our ecological crisis are already meeting with a great deal of resistance from vested interests of fossil-fuel capital (Hoggan and Littlemore 2009). To build resistance to those interests, and promote a more socially just and ecologically sustainable economy, a revitalized and ecologically conscious working-class movement is clearly essential. But the CAW leadership's decision to ally with employers to defend the industry's structure as it is, rather than ally with progressive environmentalists to demand a transition to a more sustainable transportation industry and system, represents a lost opportunity to begin creating the kind of collective agency necessary to confront the most serious problems generated by contemporary capitalism. Moreover, the current economic crisis certainly makes it more difficult for unions to make this kind of shift, and easier to see social unionist commitments as a "frill" or unaffordable luxury in tough times. This indicates that the adoption of social unionism as such may be superficial, and may provide limited resources for the challenges faced by unions and workers in the years to come.

However, while unions do not make choices in conditions of their own choosing, they do make choices (Yates 1998, 74). The CAW leadership's choice to mobilize and reproduce the material and ideological bases of automobility in a defense of autoworkers' vested interests in existing jobs closed down possibilities for alliances with environmental organizations on the climate change issue, rather than creating spaces where a broader reframing of both autoworker and environmental activists' interests could take place (what Snow and Benford (1998) call processes of frame alignment). However, this outcome was not inevitable, given the more expansive identities and strategies that have been in play in the union over the past thirty years. The collective action frames and strategic repertoire of a more militant social unionism still have resonance within the autoworker (and broader) membership, and could be reactivated should the leadership opt to actively reframe the definition of membership interests. In that sense, and without ignoring the real economic and political pressures that both leadership and membership face, the CAW can still choose to wield the "sword of justice," for its own membership and fellow citizens.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

Funding

Notes

1. For a more extensive review of the literature on and critical discussion of social unionism and the way that variations in its practice shape the effectiveness of its outcomes, see Ross (2007) and Ross (2008).
2. Mathews, Dinsdale, and Clark had also defended corporate polluters, including Varnicolor Chemicals against charges they had been illegally dumping toxic waste.
3. The IBT pulled out of the coalition supporting drilling in ANWAR in 2008.
4. There is an extensive literature on the roots of the CAW/UAW split in 1985. Negotiations with GM in 1984 were the precipitating crisis, with the Canadian section refusing to adopt the UAW's concessions on wages and cost-of-living adjustments and insisting on the right to an independent bargaining strategy and ability to opt for strike action without approval from the International Union. In part, these divergent approaches were reflections of ideological and political differences in the two sections of the union about the role of unions and the nature of union democracy. However, the accelerating differences in economic conditions for autoworkers in Canada and the United States as well as the rise of left nationalism within the Canadian labor movement during the 1970s (which contributed to numerous struggles for Canadian independence from U.S.-based parent unions) were major contributing factors. See Yates (1990, 1993), Holmes and Rusonik (1991), Gindin (1995), and Wells (1997).
5. The CAW bargained the elimination of mercury switches with GM and Chrysler in 2002; GM eliminated the switches at the end of 2002, while Chrysler followed in 2003 (CAW 2002a, 15; 2002b, 15).
6. The Canadian auto industry's product mix emphasizing larger vehicles, rather than the more fuel-efficient models produced by the same companies elsewhere, derives from the structure of the Auto Pact (1965-2001). That policy required U.S. automakers to produce in Canada the same dollar value of vehicles they sold in the country, in order to sustain levels of Canadian employment in the industry. Because of this, it was more profitable for the industry to build larger and more expensive vehicles in Canada and import smaller, more fuel-efficient ones.
7. It has been observed that, despite the substantive differences over politics and the strategic approach to employers that led to the CAW-UAW split, these differences have become less stark over time, on both the issues of concession bargaining and climate change. The CAW's retreat from both militant collective bargaining and more movement-oriented versions of social unionism is a complex process, involving the changing place of Canadian auto production in the North American commodity chain, the gradual closing down of space for grassroots democracy and debate in the union's decision-making bodies, the ideological stamp of particular leaders like Hargrove on union policy (and the discourse of loyalty in times of crisis which has constrained criticism of those policies), and the ambivalent outcomes of larger and militant social unionist endeavors like the Ontario Days of

Action (1995-1998). Our argument, that the culture of automobility has constrained the expression of environmental social unionism, is one part of a larger exploration of causes of the union's transformation. While this is beyond the scope of the present article, see Wells (1997), Gindin (2006), Goldfield and Palmer (2007), and Rosenfeld (2009) for elaboration on these aspects.

8. While it is possible to improve the fuel efficiency of any vehicle, including SUVs and sports cars with high-power engines, all things being equal, the largest vehicles are necessarily heavier, require more fuel, and can never be made more fuel efficient than smaller cars.

9. Unfortunately, the small-car assembly is last in the list of proposals, which may indicate something about the relative priority the union places on attempts to alter employer decisions about their productive activities. Like Extended Producer Responsibility, the idea has not been realized, and the St. Thomas plant, which produced the very large Town Car and Crown Victoria, was closed in late 2009.

10. Negotiations for the CAW's re-entry began with Ken Lewenza Sr.'s assumption of the CAW presidency in 2009 and took effect in June 2010 (Van Alphen 2010, June 11).

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Bios

Derek Hrynyshyn teaches political science and labor studies at York University in Toronto, Canada and McMaster University in Hamilton, Canada. He received his PhD from York University in Toronto.

Stephanie Ross is assistant professor of work and labor studies at York University in Toronto, Canada, and is coordinator of the program. She received her PhD from York University in Toronto. She has been conducting a multiyear research project comparing approaches to social unionism in the Canadian labor movement.