

Labour Environmentalism and the Keystone XL Pipeline

Labour Environmentalism and the Keystone XL Pipeline: Strategies for Economic Justice and Union Renewal

By: Ely Fair

Abstract:

Globally, unions have failed to recognize the class nature of ecological destruction. The unequal distribution of wealth in global capitalism has not only driven the ecological crisis, but it is expected that climate chaos and resource scarcity will deepen the divide between the world's rich and poor. As the primary advocates for value re-distribution in the economy, unions have a key role to play if there is to be any hope for a transition away from ecologically destructive production.

This paper investigates union responses to the Keystone XL Pipeline, a large crude oil infrastructure project running through Canada and the United States. Stakeholder unions have taken dramatically divergent positions with regards to this project, despite the purported 'zero-sum' nature of extraction industry expansion. Through a comparison of the Canadian Energy and Paperworkers Union (CEP) and the Laborers International Union of North America (LIUNA), we hope to contribute to a deeper understanding of the factors affecting labour-environmental relations. Additionally, we propose a reframing of unions' environmental action; arguing that environmentalism could play a significant role in the revitalization of an anti-hegemonic labour movement.

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A special thanks to Sarah Hendricks for her invaluable work as assistant to this research.

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Introduction

The environmental catastrophe wrought by developed capitalism occupies an ever increasing share of media and academic discourse. Year by year more agree that the most imminent crisis of capitalism is an environmental one. This conclusion stands in stark contrast to classical economists' predictions of labour alienation as the ultimate destabilizing force.

Relying heavily on classical analysis, many labour unions have been late to realize the dire impacts climate chaos and resource shortage will have upon working people of the world. Organized labour often finds itself siding with large capital in environmental debates, favouring polluting industries in the name of employment growth. Still, the power of unions as a force for a more sustainable future cannot be overlooked.

The literature is clear: labour/environmental alliances have a powerful theoretic potential to create change in our society. Unfortunately, the conclusions from these works offer inconsistent insight into the successful operation of future labour/environmental alliances. Additionally, the limited number of available case studies do not paint a cogent picture of how that potential is best harnessed and employed. It is with a mind to address this research gap that we present this work.

We begin with an exploration of the intersectionality between inequality and the environmental destruction; followed by a look at the institutional interests of unions with regards these crises. The theoretic section of the paper is completed with an evaluation of the union renewal potential latent in environment justice advocacy.

The central body of the paper is occupied with presenting the specifics of the case and its two union actors. The Keystone pipeline presents itself as a project of particular interest; the oil sands are an extraction industry, traditionally viewed as a zero-sum game by union researchers, yet the labour movement is far from monolithic in its response to the industry. The Laborers International Union of North America (LIUNA) and the Canadian Energy and Paperworkers Union (CEP) were selected due to their similarity as stake-holders and their dramatically divergent positions on the pipeline. The pipeline's significance and the response of each union are taken in turn.

In the final section, we evaluate the theoretic claim that environmental action will not only lead to union renewal, but will also position the labour movement as an anti-hegemonic

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force. We then embed this work within the broader literature, testing five prominent theoretic variables against our research findings.

1.Theory

1.1 Inequality and the Environmental Crisis

Despite the best intentions of the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals (MDG) the world remains starkly divided. On one side stands the 1.2 billion people living below the international poverty line, on the other, the citizens of the developed world (Olinto et al. 2013). The disparity in resource use between these groups is almost unimaginable. When compared to those living in under-developed nations, residents of the first world utilize on average 30 to 50 times as much fresh water and emit 10 to 50 times the CO2 tonnage (Royal Society 2012). Yet, these kinds of inter-nation comparisons actually mask the depth of resource inequality. Wealth disparity *within* nations continue to rise (the global gini coefficient standing at 39) (CIA 2014).

The earth is in a dual crisis, one humanitarian and one ecological. It is clear that the world's poor must have greater access to resources and yet humanity's total resource use must fall sharply if we are to have any hope of avoiding disastrous climate chaos. In a tragic feedback loop, blossoming first world consumption drives greenhouse gas emissions; while rising precarity forces ever growing numbers of people to make environmentally destructive survival decisions (FAO 2002).

As resource scarcity intensifies more of the globe's people are driven to the periphery. Population growth, increasingly unpredictable rain patterns, and market speculation press already staggering food prices higher (Mullin 2010). In this context, international capital, reliant on production and consumption in the under-developed world, will find it difficult to defend their investments. Super consumption in the center may absorb lost demand for a short time, but lagging long-term demand coupled with price instability will significantly impede effective economic growth.

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1.2 Unions and the Inequality-Ecology Nexus

Unions, as working class organizations embedded in capitalism, have an interest in reversing the current inequality and ecological damage trends. In doing so, they can also hope to stave off the coming economic chaos.

Though there is some debate about the appropriate long-term goals of the labor movement, all agree that unions must advocate for the economic and social interests of their workers. As such, they play an indispensable role in the re-allocation of value to employees through wage negotiation. Optimally, unions would effectively limit inequality by forcing depressed profit portions. Historically, the best that can be hoped for is the establishment of a wage floor sufficient to avoid the most dire consequences of poverty and inequality. By mitigating inequality unions have already begun to fight ecological destruction, yet it is clear that much more need be done. The effects of environmental degradation will be disproportionately felt by the working class. The race and class aspects of pollution have been well documented (Bullard 2002). In a tragedy, not void of irony, it is the very workers who labour in polluting industries to feed their families that are later sickened by the presence of those toxins in the environment.

Internationally, unions have long recognized their members' interests with regards to harmful industrial outputs; yet, workers' environmental stake extends well beyond toxin by-products (Dewey 1998). The resource scarcity of a post-peak oil/post-peak metals world will drastically affect access rights for most of the globe's population.

It may be that in the global north workers will maintain some of their relative purchasing power strength. Still, the burden of unstable and inflationary pricing will be braced on the shoulders of every nation's working poor through declining real wages. Additionally, climate chaos is expected to cause significant damage to existing infrastructure. Given the neo-liberal state's willingness to use crisis as a means towards wealth centralization, it can be expected that working people will pay hand over fist (Peet 2011).

It is clear that the long-term institutional goals of the union movement align with the push towards a greening of the capitalist economy through a so called Just Transition and New Green Deal. If successful, such a program would decrease the pace of ecological destruction, while simultaneously shrinking the income gap, thus mitigating some of the

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coming economic instability.

1.3 The Green New Deal: Politics, Economics, and Union Renewal

Within the United States, despite vocal climate change denial, a government driven 'green transition' continues to gain political traction. All parties agree that transforming the economy to low-carbon dioxide output will require extreme infrastructure investments. Additionally, the technological innovation needed will open massive market space. Both factors are expected to contribute to rising average profit rates.

Great economic agitation always precipitates winners and losers within the capitalist class. This divided class interest among capitalists goes far in explaining the government's faltering approach to green economics. Still, rising input prices, in the coming years, will force the issue in the public forum.

The labor effects of a green transition are hotly debated. Globally, unions work tirelessly to push the debate beyond 'jobs vs. the environment' (ICFTU 2002). The development of Just Transition policies is vital in mitigating worker instability. Several significant studies illustrate the potential for targeted government spending to enable a (near) full employment green transition economy (UNEP 2011).

But what is the real economic potential of green capitalism? A sustainable economy must, by definition, extract at a constant rate, this rate being no greater than the recuperation rate of the resource base. The nature of profits and investment competition within capitalist markets ensures production growth. Tisdell argues that, "employment of labour in the capitalist system depends on the level of economic activity and capital accumulation, and the maintenance of employment usually requires continuing economic growth" (Tisdell 2004, 64). Historic analyses well corroborates this: stable or declining investment opportunities result in slumping profit margins across the economy, which in turn drives unemployment and puts irresistible downward pressure on real wages (Baran, Sweezy 1966).

All this suggests that while a Green New Deal may be, in the short term, politically and economically feasible its very success will drive the capitalist class to oppose it. A movement to green the economy can only hope to slow the pace of inequality and ecological destruction. The capitalist world is not systemically capable of solving for its own growth problem. Any true

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solution to the ecological crisis will require an anti-hegemonic movement capable of challenging the logic of growth and inequality.

Herein lies the real potential of a labour struggle to green capitalism: the political feasibility and short-term benefits of a transition economy could be leveraged to re-position the labour movement as a significant anti-hegemonic social force.

Firstly, the economic growth caused by a green transition will drive up employment, particularly in geographically specific work, i.e. infrastructure. Declining unionization rates have been convincingly linked to uncertainty in the labour market (Schnabel 2012). If advantage is taken, the green employment boom can be expected to increase union market power.

Secondly, participation in environmental struggles will drive organization renewal. It has been well established in the union renewal literature that the experience of fighting with the union (win or lose) is paramount in creating commitment among the rank and file (Fairbrother, Yates 2003). While these studies have focused on conflicts around the workplace, we contend that these conclusions can be extended to all union struggles. The significant lesson for workers being that the union is a vital avenue through which one can fight for individual and community autonomy.

Yet, labour-environment coalition campaigns hold more promise still. While a workplace campaign may invigorate labourers, coalition work also invigorates environmentalists. Ecological activists working alongside rank and file members will be hard pressed to maintain the perception of unions as corrupt business organizations. It is hoped that they will come to, instead, view unions as a legitimate means through which they can pursue their own economic goals.

Finally, the cross pollination of labour and environmental organizations forces a re-evaluation of class interest within both movements. It has been argued that the limited solidarity between unions and environmental groups can be attributed to their different class backgrounds (Gould, et al. 2004). While both are composed almost exclusively of wage earners, the failure of the left to maintain clear class rhetoric has been hugely detrimental to creating an unified anti-hegemonic force. It is hoped that, as the organizational gap between the movements close, so will this false class gap begin to seal.

Labour environmentalism holds great promise, not only for its own renewal, but for the

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development of an effective challenge to the capitalist logic of production. In the words of the Labor Network for Sustainability executive director Joseph Uehlein, “The renewal of the American labour movement is dependant upon the labour movement becoming a central player in the movement to build a sustainable future for the planet and its people” (Uehlein 2014).

2.The Case

2.1 The Keystone XL Pipeline

As the Keystone XL (KXL) pipeline debate rages into its eighth year, it has cemented into the U.S. political discourse as the most heated and divisive national environmental issue. A project of TransCanada, the pipeline will stretch 1,664 miles from Hardisty, Alberta, Canada to Port Arthur, Texas, United States. When completed the line will be capable of transporting 830,000 barrels of bitumen crude oil, a day, from the Athabasca oil sands to the refinery markets of the Gulf Coast. It will cross five states and represent a drastic jump in the tar sands importing capability of the United States (TransCanada 2014).

Under most circumstances, infrastructure projects of this type do not require direct presidential approval, but do KXL’s international nature it must pass the desk of President Obama. It is only this bureaucratic technicality that enables the protracted political battle. Despite the reluctance of the federal administration, TransCanada has pushed forward building the southernmost 485 miles of the pipeline, as a stand-alone pipeline project, leaving 875 miles left to be built within the United States.

For environmentalists, the project epitomizes the destructive resource exploitation of advanced capitalism. Nasa climate scientist James Hansen argues, “if Canada proceeds, and we do nothing, it will be game over for the climate” (Hansen 2012). The U.S. Federal Government has been reluctant to admit any adverse ecological consequences resulting from Keystone (Snyder et al. 2014). While, proponents such as Nebraskans for Jobs and Energy Independence claim that the pipeline will have no impact on the quantity of tar sands extracted (NJEI 2014).

Similarly, there is little consensus on the jobs impact of building KXL. Estimates range widely, with a TransCanada funded study promising 118,935 person-years of employment

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across the life of the project, while Cornell University proposes the number to be between 33,000 and 44,000 (Perryman Group 2010; Skinner, Sweeney 2011). No matter which numbers one ultimately accepts, it is clear that large infrastructure projects, such as Keystone, stimulate economic activity and will aide the United States in addressing its unemployment and GDP growth problems.

Interestingly, the U.S. and Canadian labour movements has been far from unified in their support for the project. The Amalgamated Transit and Transport Workers Unions call on the federal government to, “not approve the construction of the Keystone XL pipeline or to take any actions that lead to the further extraction of Tar Sands oil” (Waller 2013). In response, Terry O’Sullivan, president of the Laborers International Union of North America (LiUNA) stated, " [I am] repulsed by some of our supposed brothers and sisters lining up with job killers like the Sierra Club and the Natural Resources Defense Council to destroy the lives of working men and women" (Hananel 2012).

As could be expected, pipeline was hotly debated by the AFL-CIO’s Executive Council. Ultimately, the Federation released a *Statement on Energy and Jobs*, calling for upgrading and expanding U.S. pipeline capacity. This policy paper was largely perceived as a KXL endorsement, despite its tacit omission of that particular project (AFL-CIO 2013). In an attempt to unpack the complexity of union response to this infrastructure project we evaluate in turn the positions of two stakeholder unions: the LiUNA and the CEP.

2.2The LiUNA

The Laborers International Union of North America (LiUNA), founded in 1903, currently represent approximately 500,000 workers in the construction trades. They bill themselves as, “the most progressive, aggressive and fastest-growing union of construction workers, and one of the most diverse and effective unions representing public service employees” (LiUNA 2014). The union adamantly supports the Keystone Pipeline and has signed a Project Labor Agreement (PLA) with TransCanada, which insures that the vast majority of the construction work will be unionized. This at a time when employment recovery in the construction trades continues to lag far behind the rest of the economy (Kaminski 2013). The union is a clear stake-holder, with a short-term interest in the construction of KXL.

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In the last decade, LiUNA has worked closely with the environmental movement. They have been a force in the development of the 'green' weatherization market and through the Blue Green Alliance maintained formal ties with conservation groups (Smith and Brecher 2012). Additionally, they joined with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) calling for ambitious greenhouse gas emission standards (Smith 2010). Given this recent history, the union's aggressive denial of the environmental concerns surrounding KXL comes as a surprise.

LiUNA continues to call for an 'all-of-the-above' energy policy, arguing that, "the solution to climate change is comprehensive climate change legislation" (LiUNA 2014b). They oppose extreme environmental measures, which may hurt economic growth, as well as, a project-by-project approach to mitigating GHG emissions (*ibid*). More and more LiUNA, through the voice of President Terry O'Sullivan, defend their position as a progressive green force, while simultaneously bedding with industry and belittling the ecological movement (O'Sullivan 2013).

LiUNA has taken a 'no holds barred' approach to passing the Keystone Pipeline. The union has engaged in an extensive lobbying and advertising campaign. Towards environmentalists, they have applied aggressive and divisive language and recently withdrew from the Blue Green Alliance (Restuccia 2012). They publically slander unions who oppose the Pipeline and have gone so far as to threaten to picket and disrupt meetings between the CEP and U.S. unions (Wilson 2011). Additionally, they have bedded with anti-union Conservatives establishing private 'citizen's organizations', which lobby for Keystone XL (Bold Nebraska 2014). LiUNA's recent track record as an 'environmentally progressive union' is, simply put, not great.

The divergence between the LiUNA's words and actions may in part be explained by the lack of formal policy on the issue. The union has not operationalized 'progressive green action' nor 'extreme environmental measures' and therefore finds it difficult to weigh short-term project interests against their long-term commitment. This conclusion is cursory and speculative; possible variables will be discussed in detail following a background discussion of the CEP's stance on the Pipeline project.

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2.3 The CEP

The CEP was, until recently,¹ Canada's largest energy sector union, "represent[ing] 35,000 members employed in oil and gas extraction, transportation, refining, and conversion in the petrochemical and plastics sectors" (Coles 2013.) The union formed out of a merger between the Canadian Paperworkers Union, the Communications and Electrical Workers of Canada and the Energy and Chemical Workers Union in 1992. The organization currently represents roughly 4,000 bitumen workers in Fort McMurray's Suncor plant (LeFort 2014).

Since its inception, the CEP has been an environmental leader within the Canadian labour movement. Yet, it was not until 2000 that it passed its first comprehensive energy policy, calling for the acceptance of the Kyoto Protocols and a transition away from fossil fuels (Bennett 2007). In this same year, a Just Transition policy was ratified at convention, demanding a state driven transition into a sustainable economy. In 2002, with the recharacterization of the oil sands as a reserve, the CEP began to formulate policy with regards to the resource (Wilson 2014). The union's concerns fell, broadly, within two categories: the environment and economy.

Unfettered expansion of mining would never allow Canada to meet its Kyoto obligations. "Greenhouse gas emissions from new tar sands projects are expected to be the single largest contributor to Canada's greenhouse gas emissions in the next decade" (CEP 2008). Thus, the union demanded that all new projects utilize carbon capture and that the entire tar sands be 'carbon neutral' by 2020 (*ibid*).

Interestingly, the union has acted, by in large, without the influence of the environmental movement. During the construction of Keystone I, the CEP's voice was almost stand alone. The former Assistant to the President, Fred Wilson, reflected, "We took the big step, for us, of going to the National Energy Board to oppose the Keystone Pipeline. At that time, there were no environmental groups there opposing the Keystone Pipeline, it was just the CEP" (Wilson 2014).

While there has been increasing coordination between the union and environmental groups in the last few years, the two movements remain distant, despite their mutual

¹ The CEP recently merged with the Canadian Auto Workers Union to form Unifor, due to the contemporary nature of this merger and the significance of the CEP within the Keystone Pipeline debate it was decided to continue with the CEP as our second actor.

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concerns. When asked about cooperation between the CEP and environmental groups in Fort McMurray, the Local President Roland LeFort stated, “whether we are seeing a whole lot of coming together of labour and environmental groups on many campaigns?, I can’t say that it has been, for my part here very strong. At the local level there is not a whole lot of activity around environmental groups; locally there is not a big group to work with” (LeFort 2014). This comes as a surprise, given the weight past literature as put on inter-movement coordination as a pre-requisite for union environmental action (Gould, et al. 2004).

The CEP also expressed serious employment concerns surrounding the Pipeline. “Informetrica, one of Canada’s foremost economic research firms, estimated that the export of 400,000 barrels of unprocessed bitumen to the United States through the Keystone pipeline would cost Canada 18,000 jobs” (CEP 2008). Nearly all of these jobs would be in the refining and plastics sectors, workers whom the CEP organizes. So, for the union there is much to be directly gained by keeping oil sands domestic.

This has led some to conclude that the union’s position is rooted in a business-like jobs analysis (Brown 2011). On its face, there is some evidence to support this claim. The CEP has, and continues to, advocate for the expansion of an east-west energy strategy for Canada, which includes developing pipeline infrastructure. The union itself insists that such a strategy is essential if Canada is to achieve energy independence and notes that their concern for east-west energy integration pre-dates the re-characterization of the tar sands as a reserve, and the gold rush like expansion of extraction. Given the eastern seaboard’s reliance on imported fuels, the union views east-west development in import substitution terms (Wilson 2014).

The CEP focuses on a number of other macroeconomic stability and sovereignty issues. The energy and just transition policies attack the nature of unfettered energy markets, calling instead for government led extraction stability. Primary concerns surround: the undemocratic nature of current energy systems, the loss of Canadian power due to integration and reliance on the United States, and dutch disease (caused by unchecked raw exports) (CEP 2000, 2008).

The union's opposition to KXL, and tar sands expansion generally, has taken a variety of forms. They lobbied extensively for the Kyoto Protocols and have pushed tirelessly for federal just transition policies. They offer support to union and environmental organizations who wish

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to oppose the Pipeline (Wilson 2014). Additionally, union bureaucrats have participated in direct action, crossing police barricades with First Nations leaders and environmental activists (Dupuis 2011). Recently, ecological concerns were integrated into contract negotiations with Suncor in Fort McMurray (Lefort 2014). The breadth and depth of CEP responses indicates the level of commitment the union brings to 'rationalizing' Canada's energy structures.

3. The Tests

3.1 Renewal

A growing literature assesses the renewal potential of coalition building and community unionism. Notably, the work of Amanda Tattersall progresses the theoretic understanding of the role and power of effective union-community engagement (Tattersall 2010). Yet, despite the exciting theoretic developments, the case literature remains thin. Of these few, fewer still address our earlier supposition that labour-environmental campaigns have the potential to reinvigorate unions as anti-hegemonic organizations.

In *Green Bans, Red Unions*, Burgmann and Burgmann present one of the most compelling cases to support our claim (Burgmann, Burgmann 1998). Their work chronicles a union-led environmental direct action movement, which successfully integrated development concerns from a wide array of social forces, i.e. women, poor, black movements. The research compellingly argues for non-workplace action as a node of union and social justice renewal.

Unfortunately, our present case is not well designed to assess renewal. The actor selection and methodology render 'renewal' un-operationalizable. Quantitative measures such as density growth and bargaining success are confounded by the international comparison; while qualitative measures such as network density and union knowledge are well beyond our scope. Yet still, some initial reflections can be made.

The CEP's environmental position appears to have contributed to the union's internal strength. Firstly, the union has reified its value as a venue for anti-hegemonic action. In interviews, union leaders referred to the 'pride' members feel to be standing with the

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community and the 'satisfaction' they have at being able to tell their children that they are part of long term environmental solutions (Wilson 2014, LeFort 2014). These positive emotion values are tied *through* the union to environmental action.

Secondly, the process of developing and defending their ecological position seems to be contributing to an increase in social density within the union. The CEP's stance has sparked significant debate within the organization. Rank and file participation was sought during the initial writing of the energy policy and significant work was done to educate members on the logic of the stance (Newman 2005). Debate around the union position remains lively within the union today. While this discourse may contribute to internal social capital, it is not clear that it has budded into action.

Interestingly, the CEP's actions do not seem to have contributed to a more positive view of the organization among environmental activists. Instead, suspicion persists that the union's actions are motivated almost exclusively by a jobs calculus (Gaya 2014). This may be, in part, due to a historical lack of CEP interaction with environmental organizations. For years, the union's ecological work has not been labour-environmental relations, but independent labour environmentalism. It is only recently with KXL that environmental groups have joined the fight surrounding tar sands extraction. This limited coordination is not sufficient to produce the generalized reciprocity norms, so essential to long term mutualism (Johnson, Jarley 2006).

3.2 The Road to Labour Environmentalism

As noted above, the body of labour-environmental relations literature has made a series of, at times, contradictory conclusions. Here a set of five theoretic claims are explored: economic position, social unionism, cultural divide, coalition organization, and framing. This work addresses each in different ways and each to varying degrees; despite the cursory nature of the discussion here, it is hoped that it will aid in focusing future research.

Economic Position

Significant debate persists regarding the effect of a union's production position on its environmental stance. Some suggest that industrial unions, perceiving the threat posed by

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economic change, will seek the strength of coalitions (Steele 2008). Contrary to this, regulation theory predicts opposition rooting out of industries most likely to be constrained by environmental policy. In these terms, extraction industries are viewed as the least likely to achieve positive relations, being zero-sum games (Obach 2002). This case ultimately offers no support for any of these claims.

It could be argued that the CEP's progressive environmental position results from a perception of long-term economic vulnerability; yet, the data does not support this proposition. During interviews, some concern was shown for the dangers of unregulated extraction markets, but environmental motivations were continually rooted in climate change concerns.

The case more directly contradicts the conclusions of regulation theory. LiUNA is well placed to maintain employment during a green transition. A carbon neutral United States will require a dramatic overhaul of housing and transportation infrastructure. The union has committed significant resources to training members for these new fields. Still, they support KXL, while advocating for no immediate alternative infrastructure path.

On the other hand, the CEP remains a significant environmental force, despite their involvement in the fossil fuels, paper, and forestry sectors; sectors bound for dramatic change and reduction in a 'green' Canada. Speaking of unions in rational economic actor terms appears fruitless under these circumstances. If their decisions are logical, it is a logic other than economics.

Social Unionism

A number of authors point to the adoption of a broader social justice framework as key to cooperation between labor and environmental movements. Steele writes, "While labor unions are concerned with economic justice and environmental organizations focus on environmental justice, both can be encompassed in a social justice frame because the focus of both movements is based on the principles of 'citizenship rights, the democratic process and respect'" (Steele 2008). This sentiment is mirrored in Dreiling where social movement unionism and environmental justice are seen as possessing the, "ideological and organizational potential to actively build cross-movement... alliances" (Dreiling 1998). The flip side of this being, of course, the limited ability of business unions and conservationist groups to meet across the aisle (*ibid*).

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These positions offer little explanatory power with regards to this case. While the rhetoric of the CEP is more radical than LiUNA, both unions have had extensive contemporary involvement in coalition building and community activism. Each organization has made race and gender discrimination a key issue. Similarly, both applaud their democratic processes. It was suggested in interviews that LiUNA's pro-pipeline position may be a result of their not being a 'social union', but the Laborers themselves would not see it in this way (Wilson 2014).

It is clear that, a great part of the difficulty in assessing this variable is operationalization. "'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" (Hrynyshyn, Ross 2011). There have been a number of attempts to clarify and categorize the term (Ross 2007). While this literature has created interesting frameworks for understanding differences between social unionisms, it has not enabled prediction.

We hold that analytic systems are valuable in proportion to their ability to facilitate descriptive and predictive conclusions. It does little good to describe a union's inner workings in terms that cannot be applied directly to other settings or unions. This case supports earlier conclusions that for social unionism to be a useful tool, it will have to be further theorized. We depart from previous writers in that our call is for a discrete and comparable set of characteristics deemed 'social'.

Cultural Divide

It is argued that the divergent class bases of unions and environmental movements makes cooperation between the two groups exceedingly difficult (Gould, et al. 2004). Unions are deemed 'working' class organizations whose social position selects for selfish values, while 'middle' class environmental groups draw on altruistic ethics in pursuing their goals (Bonanno, Blome 2000).

Another thread of this line suggests that the cultural divide has created a spatial mismatch with environmental movements focused on global issues and labor primarily interested in local crises (Snell et al. 2009). Or put another way, there is a, "gap between... an anthropocentric environmentalism among those less economically secure, and a biocentric conceptualization of environmentalism more common among those who are relieved of more

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immediate survival concerns” (Gould, et al: 2004).

While the objective reality of this class division stands on shaky grounds at best, the *perception* of difference could have real consequences. The Laborers have engaged an aggressive class and cultural divide rhetoric. Referring to environmental organizations as “professional activists and lawyers” who, “destroy the lives of working men and women” (NJEI 2011, O’Sullivan 2012). In response to the 2012 denial of the Pipeline’s permit, LiUNA President Terry O’Sullivan stated, “instead of celebrating their victory by hugging a tree they should hug a jobless construction worker because they’re the ones who are going to need it” (LiUNA 2012). This is a stark departure from his 2008 comments upon joining the Blue-Green Alliance when he vowed that, “creating a green economy will build our country, create good jobs, and leave a positive legacy for generations to come (O’Sullivan 2008).

In contrast, the CEP continually frames environmental work in broader economic class terms. They positioned their Just Transition Policy to, “address the needs of communities and working class people at large, strengthening the labour movement by underlining [their] commitment to the public good” (CEP 2000). The position is rooted firmly within a global biocentric analysis of climate change. They argue, “our current economic system is dependent on endless growth even though it’s clear as day that unrestrained growth is environmentally unsustainable (Coles 2013).

This research does not support the proposition that unions and environmental organizations have an objective class/cultural separation, which makes alliances difficult. It may be instead that unions utilize the language of unity and division as tools to achieve organizational priorities. This conclusion is further supported by the following discussion on framing.

Coalition Organization

The vast majority of labour-environmental relations (LER) literature addresses itself to the formation of coalitions between these two groups. The very discipline is named in such a way as to suggest initial separation, and therefore need for ‘relations’, between the interests. Many authors debate the optimal form which labour-environmental coalitions should take, but the logic of coalitions is rarely challenged (Steele 2008).

In this case, viewing coalitions as an indicator of environmental activism is counter

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predictive. LiUNA joined the Blue Green Alliance in 2008, but left the organization over internal disagreements surrounding KXL. In the aftermath, they slandered the very environmental groups with which they had previously campaigned.

The CEP has only just begun joining labour-environmental coalitions. As was noted earlier, the union stood solitary in its opposition to Keystone I. When ecological organizations became concerned with Keystone XL, it was the union, which supplied information and support (Wilson 2014).

Their habit of going it alone has begun to change, with coordinated campaigns and civil disobedience. Still, they continue to escalate independently of environmental groups. In Fort McMurray, local 707 recently incorporated emissions and water concerns into their contract negotiations; while no environmental organizations have sought established relations with the union local (LeFort 2014).

Joseph Uehlein contends that, “coalitions by nature are cautious, slow and their mission goes to the least common denominator” (Uehlein 2014). This is not to suggest that coalition building is not a powerful tool, but that coalitions must not be viewed as the highest value. Unions are capable of autonomously developing and advocating for radical environmental concerns. It may be that an obsession with coalition and organization formation has hampered the ability of unions to act and be seen as actors. The labour movement will continue to struggle to find its place in environmentalism until it can justify itself as an important party in its own right.

Framing

Some literature suggests that differences in issue framing explain alternative policy outcomes. This is another way of suggesting that the CEP and LiUNA disagree because they see the issue differently. While not very insightful as a variable, framing research may shed light on language and identity as an organizational tool.

Institutional framing thus becomes a discursive process through which factions within an organization attempt to garner support for a previously held political belief. Shannon Daub writes “CEP’s framing work was accomplished internally through explicit and implicit negotiation processes in developing its energy policy, including education, persuasion, consultation, accommodation, and brokering between individual and collective interests”

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(Daub 2010).

If this is accepted, then none of the variables evaluated from past literature offer satisfying insight into the divergence between the CEP and LiUNA's positions. It seems the words of Fred Wilson may bear more weight than is easily admitted,

“Social science researchers are looking for factors, such as geography or industry, I don't think they would ever find any causality. I think different policy prospects are explained by a commitment to social unionism, which is a political attribute. And it has got to do with their leadership and their history and things that are kind of intangible” (Wilson 2014).

He goes on to say, “I don't think that there is really any easy answer as to why there are these differences. The labour movement is a political movement and there are different political tendencies within the labour movement (*ibid*).” Taken in these terms, piecing apart the objective forces behind a union's particular environmental stance seems absurd.

This case offers further evidence for the claim. One participant, when questioned on the impetus for the CEP's environmental position, stated,

“it [was] a combination of some genuinely progressive and concerned people on the one hand and a more broad appreciation of having a left cover by less concerned and progressive people. That we could say ‘we aren't opposed to this progressive stuff, see we have a policy right here’” (McGuckin 2014).

These organizational outcomes are rooted in the political goals of individual leaders and the perceived political interests of the organization. Additionally, the earlier observation that class/culture language is utilized by both unions towards different ends, supports the notion that political beliefs precede labour-environmental conflict/compromise.

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Conclusions

We propose that it is in the interest of the union movement to aggressively pursue a just transition to a 'green' economy. The theoretic benefits proffered by this position are three fold: first, economic restructuring will likely increase employment; second, ecological damage is primarily effecting poor working class people whom the movement represents; and finally, environmental activism will aid labour in becoming a renewed anti-hegemonic force.

Other works have developed the first and second of these postulates, it is on the third that this case sheds some limited light. While more research is needed, the CEP's progressive environmental stance seems to have validated the image of the union as a viable avenue of resistance. Further, their tactics have increased internal social density, an important measure of organizational strength. Interestingly, the union's activism has not dissolved distrust felt towards organized labour by many environmentalists.

As for our five theoretic variables from the literature, none explain the difference between our two case actors. Instead, it is suggested that the divergence of environmental positions may best be explained by union's political nature. It makes little sense to pursue the external variables contributing to the social policies of political parties; the futility of the method may extend to unions as well.

In light of this conclusion, predicting a union's environmental position, utilizing external variables, may be an impossibility. This is not to suggest that LER best practices cannot be developed, but that the literature has been wandering a crooked course to this goal. Specific *internal* practices may be linked with environmental policy outcomes. Future case studies should attempt longitudinal analysis of discrete union policies and structures. It is hoped that this will yeild a more nuansed understanding of the interaction between organizational structure, political history, and contemporary policy outlook.

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