

CAN HISTORY REPEAT ITSELF AS TRADE UNIONS REVERT TO BEING NASCENT AGAIN? LESSONS FROM THE SOUTH AFRICAN LABOUR EXPERIENCE FOR YOUNG CANADIAN UNION ORGANISERS

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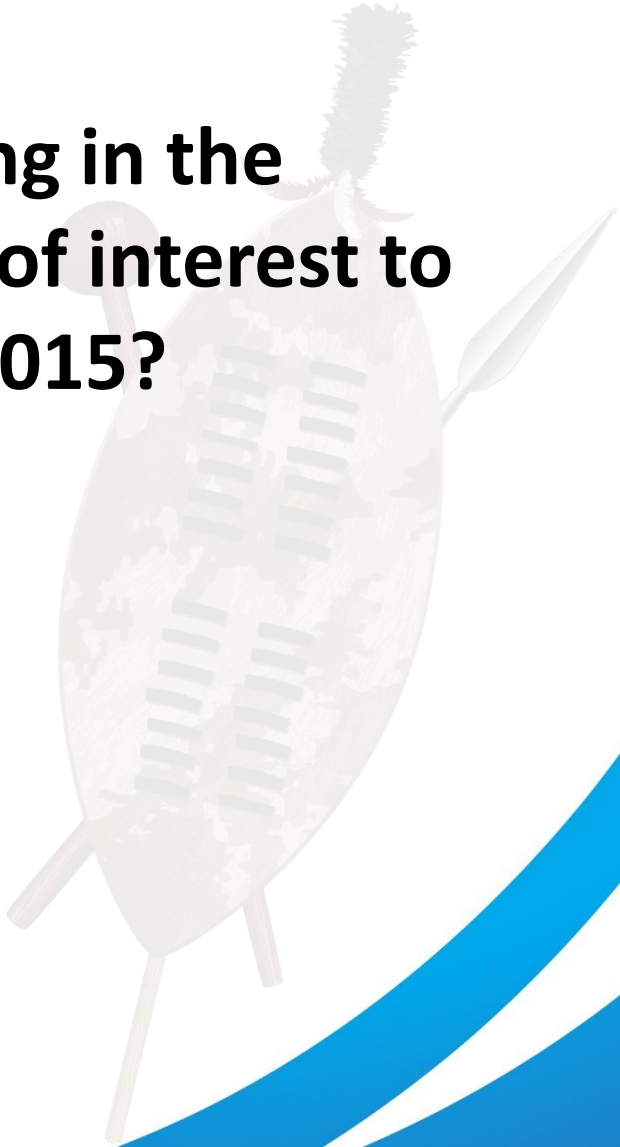


What role did trade unions play in the continuing quest for the securing and maintaining of a democratic regime in South Africa?

Further, is there anything in this experience that could serve as a lesson to labour movements in other parts of the world?



More specifically is there anything in the South African experience that is of interest to (young) Canadian organisers in 2015?

A faint, light-colored illustration of a traditional African spearsman is visible in the background on the right side of the slide. The figure is shown from the back, wearing a feathered headdress and holding a spear. The illustration is semi-transparent and blends into the white background.

Canadian Labour Situation in 2014

- Union density has fallen from a all-time high of 38% in 1981 to **30%** in 2014
- Private sector union density in 2014 is **16%** (1,935,900 'ees)
- Public sector union density in 2014 is **74.7%** (2,651,100 'ees)
- Male union density has declined from 42% to 29% in last twenty years; female union density has remained at 31%
- Decline in unionisation is more pronounced in younger 'ees
- Job quality declining: no. of part-time jobs increasing faster than full time; no. of self employed workers increasing four times faster than paid employees; no. of low paying jobs increasing faster than mid and high paying jobs

Perspectives amongst 10 young Canadian organisers interviewed

- “Labour movement is behind the times”
- “Unions are changing with the system rather than changing the system”
- “Unions do not reflect their membership nor the interests of their current members”
- “The union movement has a lack of progressive thought”
- “There is a need to push back against whatever it is that is oppressing people”
- “Unions should focus more on need than organisational triumph”

The South African Situation

- The Apartheid Regime; White Political Leadership; Black Resistance
- Industrial Legislation and History
- Unions as a Beacon for Democracy
- COSATU, The Triple Alliance and Gear
- The Situation in 2015



Workerism is not Necessarily Business Unionism

Why?

Because workplace change may well lead social change – it did so in South Africa, to a point



Sectionalism:-

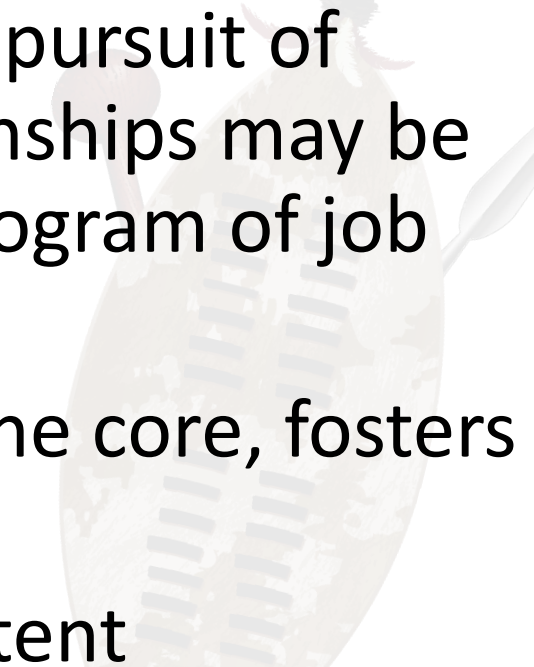
Strength or Weakness?



6 Lessons to be Learned

1. The role of tactics in Industrial Relations (workplace committees; centralised bargaining versus decentralised bargaining; closed shop versus multi-union bargaining; registered versus non-registered unions)
2. Workplace focus may ultimately achieve greater political change in the long run than a political focus
3. Union federations are better positioned to support their affiliate unions than the other way around

6 Lessons to be Learned

4. From a union perspective the pursuit of standard employment relationships may be more advantageous than a program of job creation
 5. Democratic union culture at the core, fosters democratic civic engagement
 6. Have a sense of articulated intent
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- A faint, light-colored silhouette of a person wearing a graduation cap and gown, holding a diploma, is visible in the background on the right side of the slide.