



Share some 21st Century Insights
with Joe Mulhall

Workplace Cohesion

Conflict and Contradictions

CUSW was founded in 1999 with the vision of creating a new model of union that workers could rally around as we make our way to the New Economy. CUSW represents a New Beginning. It is too simplistic to suggest that this new beginning could take place simply by holding a Convention and implementing a new framework. It is true that without having a Constitution in place that supports the new direction that there would be no vision to aim for. However it is not the framework that will drive the organizational changes that will make us a 21st Century Union. It is the members. There is no place that this is true more than in the workplace.

For the past century, labour management relations have been built on the idea that the workforce and the employers have competing interests and that the workplace is the battleground where these differences are played out – Management Rights versus Workers’ Rights. This battleground was not just a perception, it was a reality. The primary goal of the enterprise was to maximize profits and maintain as much of the profit as possible. The division of the profits was the end game of the workplace parties on both sides. The attitudes of the workplace parties were molded by this approach of dividing the scarce resources.

Still today we see this influence in the workplaces of many of our employers. The employers feel vulnerable to the pressures of the workforce and build management structures to defend against the potential of an assault on their power. The workers feel that they have no voice and that they are not receiving their share of the spoils of the profits earned through the exploitation of their Human capital. The workers are constantly looking for ways to extract either more financial benefits or more non-productive paid leisure time. It is in the context of this environment that we ask our workplace representatives to take on the role of implementing the goals of CUSW.

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When we structured CUSW we were not naive or ignorant of these challenges as we moved to introduce our model of unionism. We knew that members that were raised and groomed in the old industry would not change their attitudes overnight. We expected pushback from some of the members as we introduced cooperation and supported value-added approaches to the way that work was organized. We knew that there would be demands by the workers on our workplace representatives to maintain a stance against the employers.

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We knew that there would be pressures to maintain the status quo. All of this has come true. Some members see a union that does not fight with the employer, as weak and not doing its job. Some representatives don't know any other way.

Employers that are still operating in the old industrial model do not want us involved in their workplace. Working together is seen as letting the fox into the henhouse, and promoting the fight advances their agenda. They undermine our workplace representatives with their "management rights" style. They believe that if they can keep us in the fight they can continue to call us the enemy and justify not engaging us in the operation of the workplace. These employers still believe that Unions are a 20th Century Institution that has long passed having any purpose in our society. They completely miss the value of the union as the structure that provides for the members' voices coming together to contribute to the success of the workplace.

With all of these pressures on the day-to-day life in the workplace it is imperative that our members understand that we are united in moving past the barriers and into the future. We have agreed on a new union model. We have clearly defined the roles and have a set of values and beliefs to guide us. The members that step up to take the role as the workplace representative do so in the name of CUSW. They need to know that they are speaking for all of us when they head off to implement our Constitution and the negotiated collective agreement. They need the assurance that the membership is functioning in unity as we work towards a common goal.

– Joe Mulhall

Traits of the Information Age

Alvin Toffler is the Futurist that introduced the concept of an Information Age. Some of the traits of the Information Age that he has identified reinforce our views of a 21st Century Knowledge Worker:

- Education will become interspersed and interwoven with work, and will be more spread out over a lifetime.
- On the job, the ability to accept responsibility, to adapt swiftly to change and to be sensitive to your fellow workers will be prized.
- Successful people will be complex and individualistic.
- Blind obedience on the job will be penalized. Independent thinking, questioning of authority, talking back will be rewarded.
- Self-reliance and the ability to do things with one's own hands will become prestigious