



Share some 21st Century Insights
with Joe Mulhall

Membership and the Relationship to Work

The Canadian Union of Skilled Workers was founded as a “trade union” in 1999 to provide a legal entity that could house the bargaining rights that were displaced when the membership voted to move away from the IBEW. The “bargaining unit” that started our CUSW journey was made up of a group of workers employed as “casuals” at Ontario Hydro construction.

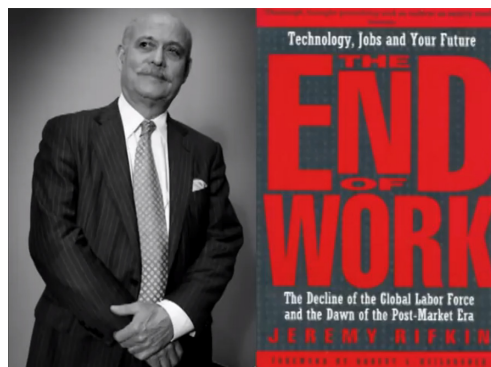
This Ontario Hydro bargaining unit had been established between 1953 and 1957 for the purpose of providing a Province wide casual workforce that could be expanded and contracted as needed to respond to the construction program at Ontario Hydro. It was from this start point that we began the journey towards becoming a 21st Century Union

Construction Unions in North America had a long history of providing casual employees to companies and contractors. Over the decades most established some form of Hiring Hall arrangement with a body of contractors, managed their own benefit plans and retirement programs, provided supplemental training where need-

ed and looked after the general welfare of the workers that were members of their union. This model would prove to be very adaptable to the changes that were coming in the world of work.

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At the same time that we were forming CUSW, the mainstream was writing about the future of work. Futurists such as Jeremy Rifkin were talking about the technology revolution and the need for a very different kind of labour force. Robert Reich, who went on to be the Secretary of Labor under the Bill Clinton Presidency, had already written a book in which he also took a futurist view. “We are living through a transformation that will rearrange the politics and economics of the coming century...Each nation’s primary assets will be its citizen’s skills and insights.” (Robert Reich, *The Work of Nations*, 1991).

By 1998 the Conference Board of Canada had weighed into the discussion. **Contingent Work: Trends, Issues and Challenges for Labour.** They predicted that 25 to 35 percent of all work in Canada would be performed by contingent workers

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by the early 21st Century. The paper defined Contingent work as 1) supplemental workers, 2) temporary workers and 3) contractors. US Legal .com defined Contingent workers to include those who are hired through staffing firms, who are independent contractors, who work less than full-time, or whose jobs are structured to last only a limited length of time.

In addition to the shift in the way work would be organized, the writers identified that learning and empowerment would be central to the goals of productivity, innovation and competitiveness. To meet this challenge, societies will need to create a skilled, quality, adaptable workforce.

Building on the concepts of the old construction framework and using the insights of those that could visualize the future of work in the New Economy we have been able to move forward on our journey. CUSW is now able to provide hiring and referral for supplemental workers through staffing agencies; temporary workers through arrangements such as the Chestnut Park Accord; contract workers through collective agreements and other employment contracts where the need arises. We can now represent all workers in our bargaining units and not just trades. We can represent workers in full time, part time, and contingent worker relationships. CUSW can now provide health benefits, retirement benefits and other supports for members and their families in all industries, in all Provinces and Territories across Canada and beyond.

We have built on what we knew in 1999. CUSW has become a union of workers that together can respond to the opportunities of the 21st Century.

Many of the traditional construction unions have evolved into employment agencies that try to control the work opportunities through monopoly union and monopoly employer relationships. Members of these unions are not committed to building the Union of the future. When employment dries up in one union

the members become freelance workers and move to other unions that have work through their monopoly employers.

Some of these folks find their way to CUSW because we have the closed shop rights to work at OPGI, Hydro One and Bruce Power. These members will come and they will

leave again. While they are here they probably will not participate. Those members that can grasp the vision of **Robert Reich** will stay. In the 21st Century, workers will be the **primary asset** for the employers and not the closed shop monopolies of the 20th Century. The “skills and insights” that our members are building will attract the businesses that want to thrive in the new economy. The Employers will come to us looking to partner for success. When they get here we need to be ready.

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