

# Book Review: International Unionism: A Study in Canadian-American Relations, by John H. G. Crispo

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Book Review

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*INTERNATIONAL UNIONISM: A study in Canadian-American relations.* JOHN H. G. CRISPO, McGraw-Hill Canada, 1967. pp. 324. (\$8.60)

Three relatively recent occurrences, the S.I.U. trusteeship, the Toronto newspaper strike, and the Canada-U.S. pact, have put the question of the desirability of Canadian participation in American dominated unions into sharper perspective. Working against this background, Professor Crispo undertook the writing of this book for the Canadian-American Committee, and, as the sub-title suggests, the emphasis is on the positions of Canadian and American unionists within their common organizations, rather than on an attempt to analyze the workability of trade unionism on a world-wide scale. He gives as among his own personal reasons for taking up the project the desire to produce objectively determined facts, hopefully leading to meaningful discussion rather than foundationless, yet uncontradictable, statements of personal prejudice.

The early chapters examine the historical development of the international union, including a discussion as to why the Canadian worker remains in these unions, (apathy plays a large part), and why American workers continue to support Canadian locals, (the pride in having an "international" status is not a small factor). Professor Crispo outlines also the development of Quebec's C.N.T.U. from a purely French, Church-dominated system of "company unions" to the radical, militant, secular and outward-looking organization it is today. Because this section is based on historical fact, and because the author wisely makes no attempt to determine any single reason for the emergence of the North American international, the reader is left to speculate as to why these unions flourished, and whether or not they will continue to do so.

Professor Crispo follows this with loosely co-ordinated observations on the position of the Canadian membership within the various

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internationals, interrupted by what seems to be an interminable collection of the names of various unions following particular practices (which would have been better relegated to footnotes). From this it is possible to conclude that, although most union constitutions make little or no provision for a separate Canadian operation, in practice many unions do have a distinct Canadian organization, its strength depending to a large extent on the quality of the personnel involved and on their support of headquarters.

Next the author thoroughly documents the history of the Canadian Labour Congress and the relationship with its American counterpart, the A.F.L.-C.I.O. Especially interesting is the great influence exerted by the A.F. of L. on the Canadian T.L.C. (craft union federation) prior to the twin mergers on both sides of the border, and the subsequently greater influence the Canadian industrial unions had in the C.L.C. Contrasted with this is the A.F.L. dominance of the American federation. Any examination of the position of the average Canadian unionist must take place on two levels. He is very likely to belong to an international within the A.F.L.-C.I.O., but he is also likely to be represented on the relative autonomous C.L.C. This divided loyalty was never more in evidence than during the Great Lakes Shipping crisis in which the S.I.U. membership vigorously opposed the imposition of a Canadian government trusteeship and defied the U.S. administration in boycotting Canadian freighters in Chicago. The C.L.C., on the other hand, supported the trusteeship and disaffiliated the S.I.U. Professor Crispo examines this crisis and other areas of conflict between the two nationally oriented federations and leaves open the question as to whether or not they will continue to work in the harmony that is supposed to exist between them.

In his chapter on the influence of U.S. collective agreements on Canadian negotiations, and vice-versa (many unions being aware of the value of a Canadian precedent in undermining their U.S. position as occurred with respect to diesel yard firemen following the C.P.R. dispute in 1957), the author discusses a recent study carried out by Professor B. N. Downie of Queen's University. This section requires some sophistication in the field of economics to be fully comprehended, but is nonetheless understandable to the average lawyer. The auto pact has created great pressure for wage parity between U.S. and Canadian auto workers, and the advantages and disadvantages of parity are discussed fully. It is in the area of collective bargaining that the locals achieve their greatest degree of responsibility and it is here that the influence of the international is clearly greater than that of the C.L.C.

However, outside this area Canadians have shown their determination to chart their own course; for example, the C.L.C. has long advocated recognition of Red China, and, contrary to American practice, openly supports the N.D.P. which it helped to create.

To answer those who maintained that international unions are in Canada mainly to "milk" the Canadian worker of his union dues, Professor Crispo shows that the picture is far from clear on this point, and that, in fact, many unions subsidize their Canadian operations, especially in the earlier organizational years.

Contrary to popular belief, many employers, and especially Canadian subsidiaries of U.S. corporations, prefer dealing with the international union because of the moderating influence it exercises. A union will not readily consent to a strike with little chance of success if it promises to drain the international strike fund. Where friction has occurred, it is in cases where the alternative is a weak union, no union at all or especially where union organization is taking place for the first time.

The book ends with an excellent summary of the advantages and disadvantages, real or imagined, in the continued existence of international unionism in Canada as seen by the worker, the employer, and the public.

Throughout this book one cannot help but see a parallel between Canadian demands for more autonomy within their unions as a recognition of the differing needs occasioned by divergent economic and political considerations in both countries, and the Quebec nationalists' cry for recognition of the "French fact" in Canada. Unfortunately, Professor Crispo has not swept away the cobwebs surrounding the international union controversy, and has demonstrated only that international unionism is good or bad in particular situations depending on one's particular point of view. What the reader does get is an overall, although not sharply defined, picture of the internal workings of the union.

One or two minor complaints come to mind. Professor Crispo has obviously chosen not to mention by name any of the colourful figures who created the international union as it is today, and in so doing has made the book far less enjoyable to read. He has also chosen not to include an index, an unforgivable omission in a text that apparently was intended to be a tool for further research.

For those who do not wish to read this rather lengthy book, a synopsis is promised, entitled "The Role of International Unionism in Canada".

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