



TELECOMMUNICATIONS WORKERS UNION

SYNDICAT DES TRAVAILLEURS
EN TÉLÉCOMMUNICATIONS



January 24, 2007

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MEMO: TO ALL TWU LOCALS

On November 15th, 2006 the following motion was submitted to TWU Executive Council from Local 5:

“WHEREAS the Telecommunications Workers Union represents workers across Canada and now faces significant operational, representational and financial performance challenges before the expiry of the TELUS-TWU collective agreement in 2010; now

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that a committee be struck by Executive Council to investigate the possibility of a merger or affiliation with another union; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the appointment of the committee be struck from Executive Council, from local executives and from members at large.”

There was a motion to refer this to the table officers, however, that motion was defeated and instead the following motion was carried:

“Motion that the Acting President, Vice-Presidents, and the Secretary-Treasurer write a letter to the Locals with a response to the pros and cons of merger and that the Merger Committee information be removed immediately from the TWU website until such time as the Executive Council makes a determination that there is a need for one and that letters be sent to the applicants advising them that their applications will be kept on file.”

In addition to the above-noted motion, TWU Executive Council has received a few similar motions from other locals requesting a feasibility study on mergers and/or the formation of a committee to investigate the possibility of a merger with a larger entity.

To that end, this letter is meant to communicate to all locals, Executive Council’s majority position thus far on the issues of mergers.

From a practical perspective, it is difficult to lay out the pros and cons of mergers generally because so much depends on the arrangement or agreement stipulated by the parties involved in any potential merger. The CLC Constitution Article 2, Item 11 states that the CLC will “actively encourage mergers between compatible affiliates to create stronger, more effective unions and reduce conflict and duplication.” Similarly, the AFL-CIO Policy on Encouraging National Union Mergers is committed to supporting appropriate mergers recognizing that “Effective union mergers strengthen the labour movement and inappropriate mergers can weaken it.”

Mergers are encouraged by these national bodies because, in general terms, it is thought that mergers can be beneficial provided they are arranged between compatible bodies with similar goals and that they are considered in order to achieve the desired effect, e.g. economies of scale and reduced jurisdictional disputes. Many proponents of union mergers also claim that mergers produce increased bargaining power and an enhanced ability to strike and that mergers enable unions to organize more effectively, but some research (i.e. When Unions Merge by Gary Chaison) indicates that these are probably not outcomes which are shared by a significant number of merged unions. Notably, our recent experience at the TELUS bargaining table does not lend itself to the argument that the involvement of a bigger union achieves superior results. In point of fact, depending on what is negotiated between merging bodies, there could be much more to lose than to gain when considering possible outcomes of a merger. It is important to be cognizant that commitments regarding autonomy can be easily struck down by a majority vote should we be absorbed by a larger body and the consequences could be devastating.

An analytical review of Canadian union mergers over the past 50 years reflects that most union mergers are not prompted by the membership of the unions involved, but by union officials. Typically, members are only consulted once an agreement has been negotiated and members are left with a 'take it or leave it' proposal. The TWU Executive Council does not agree with this approach and feels strongly that membership participation and debate is vital to the decision making process should any merger be considered.

It is important that our members know that the TWU Executive Council is neither for nor against mergers, affiliations, or other arrangements such as a council of trade unions. However, given the possible negative impacts of a merger, we maintain that NO action should be considered without much study, debate and deliberation. We also believe that mergers should be democratically arrived at, that they should be voluntary and not predatory in nature and that they should not be acts of desperation. We also strongly believe that they should be negotiated for the benefit of the members and not to further the political aspirations of leadership.

There are resolutions coming to the March, 2007 Convention that are proposing methods to study the question of merger and other arrangements, and we are confident that these issues will be carefully considered and roundly debated. Since Convention is the highest governing authority, it is the position of Executive Council that Convention is the appropriate forum for this proposition. Post convention, it is the intention of Executive Council to once again communicate with the Locals as to Convention's instructions with respect to this matter.

As always, we appreciate hearing from the Locals and encourage you to communicate any thoughts or concerns.

In Solidarity,

TWU Table Officers

John Carpenter, Acting President

Jim Christensen, Secretary-Treasurer

Peter Massy, Vice-President

Betty Carrasco, Acting Vice-President

cc: TWU Executive Council

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