

Transcript
National Press Club Discussion

JOHN MONKS
General Secretary, Trades Union Congress

introduction by
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These remarks were delivered at a luncheon discussion on workforce development and training sponsored by the Albert Shanker Institute and the New Economy Information Service in Washington, D.C. on January 3, 2003, as part of an ongoing exploration of this topic.

Morton Bahr: We are here to discuss a matter that many of us see as a necessity for the growth of the labor movement — its contribution to the skills and education of our workforce. This is an imperative not only because today's union member is required to keep up his or her skills to stay afloat in a changing economy, but also because many of us believe we can build our unions by offering education and training services to workers. This is especially true when we consider workers in the so-called New Economy, where traditional ways of organizing do not always resonate.

John Monks, General Secretary of the British Trades Union Congress, has helped lead the TUC in boldly redefining itself as a movement of skills developers. The TUC and its affiliates have partnered with employers, government and educational institutions to develop many first-rate training programs. They not only have mounted a successful campaign to gain employer and public funding for union-sponsored training, they also have pioneered in establishing union-based training representatives.

These union staff members advise union members at the job site about their training needs and the programs that may be available to accommodate those needs. These initiatives have cast the TUC as a movement engaged in their country's economic renewal, one that is firmly committed to the productivity, competitiveness and stability of unionized employers, and to the needs and aspirations of individual union members.

My own union has been aggressive in this field here in the United States. When the Bell System was broken up in January of 1984, and domestic and global competition were introduced into what for 100 years had been a protected monopoly, we knew the lives of our telecommunications members would never be the same. No longer could a worker leave high school at age 18, start working for the telephone company, and retire 30 or more years later with a full pension, often leaving from the same building where he or she had been hired 30 years before.

We were required to redefine job security. We redefined it by helping our members make themselves more employable. If possible, they would be able to stay with the employer they were already

working for. But, if not, they could find work in the general marketplace. We sought to do this through expanded education and training programs.

In 1986, we bargained with AT&T to create the first educational corporation in the telecommunications industry jointly owned by labor and management. We have come to see these workplace and training programs not only as essential to our industry, but also to our nation's competitiveness. Other unions also have developed impressive programs of their own, among them the electrical workers, the machinists, the teachers, the seafarers, and many others. Perhaps we in the U.S. now should begin thinking of all these efforts as a whole that can be larger than the sum of its parts — as something that can be a strategically important component of the broader labor cause.

Now let's hear what John Monks has to say. John Monks became General Secretary of the TUC in September 1993 after heading its Organizing Department and serving as its Deputy General Secretary. In January 2001, the TUC adopted his proposal to create a Partnership Institute. The TUC is aiming to change British workplaces by establishing partnerships as a potentially successful approach to industrial relations. The Institute trains business managers and union leaders in ways of working together. With the election of Tony Blair in 1997, John was able to gain government backing for a Union Learning Fund to finance more labor training programs than could be supported through the collective bargaining process alone. The Fund has recently begun to support union learning representatives, union staff who advise prospective trainees at the workplace.

This spring, John will pass on his training and partnership legacy to Brendan Barber and move on to become a candidate to succeed Emilio Gabaglio as General Secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC). The ETUC leadership has decided to support John's candidacy for General Secretary when the 10th ETUC Statutory Congress convenes in Prague on May 26-29 of this year.

John, we in the U.S. have heard intriguing bits and pieces about new ideas and new programs that are being tried out in Britain. It has been said that the TUC's partnership training has helped labor reach entry-level and younger workers, and that you are finding ways to appeal to technical and professional employees who are eager for skills that will make them more competitive and productive. It is said that employers are granting more respect and standing and decision-making authority to employees as a result of the TUC's efforts. Some claim that TUC programs strengthen labor's role in shaping the labor market in the technical and professional sectors. And, of course, we hear that these efforts are changing labor's public image, its standing within the Labour Party, and its appeal to its membership. Now, John, is all this true? Or have we been fed a bill of goods by your public relations folks? If it is true, we are going to want to learn a lot more, and you are the man with the credentials to explain it.

John Monks: I am not asked often to talk about workforce development and training. It is about the least sexy subject you can ever put on the agenda of a trade union meeting. And "lifelong learning" may be the most deadly phrase I have ever heard: only one level up from a life sentence at San Quentin. Think of yourself as a kid who did not do too well at school, and who was very relieved to escape into the world of work. Then somebody comes along and says, "Have I got a great idea for you: lifelong learning."

The world of vocational learning is also a realm of horrendous jargon. There may be at most four people who understand the vocational training qualification system in Britain. I am the Vice Chairman of the Learning and Skills Council of England, and I don't understand it. The academic

routes are pretty clear, but the vocational education routes are complex, jargon-ridden, and impenetrable for many. The story I want to tell you today starts back in 1987. We had a cataclysmic miners' strike. Arthur Scargill was at the head of it, pitted against Mrs. Thatcher. It took the mobilization of the whole resources of the state to defeat him, but she did it. Arthur Scargill had argued mightily that defeat for the miners would be defeat for the whole labor movement, and that was one thing he got right. We were all defeated. Militancy ground to a dead halt. Any employer faced with a restless group of workers said, "Do you want to end up like the militant miners?" Rupert Murdoch followed up with the London printers' conflict: there was a series of disputes in which regiments of workers were thrown against the barbed wire as in a First World War infantry charge. The unions were bruised, bleeding and losing members fast. Militancy against the government was leading us nowhere. We put a lot of faith in the resurgence of the Labor Party under then-leader Neal Kinnock, but he lost in 1987. What, many asked, was the purpose then of the TUC, of organized labor? That was the year I became Deputy General Secretary of the TUC.

The first thing we decided to do was to try to find out a bit more about what rank-and-file workers wanted. What did they want from unions? What were they looking for from work? We commissioned someone to do some opinion research. The results surprised us. What did the workers want? First, job security. Second--this was the surprise--esteem. I had never seen that word on any union agenda, but it came in second. The respondents didn't mean esteem in general. They meant that they wanted to be held in respect by the people for whom they worked, and the organization for which they worked. If you want to be miserable, they were telling us, work for somebody who doesn't respect you. Perhaps that issue should not have been a surprise, but it was, because we had just never talked about it as a union issue. Then came our third issue: pay. A lot of us had expected that pay would be listed at least second, and perhaps first. And the number four issue on the list was skills and training. Work hours, vacations and other traditional workplace issues were quite a bit lower down on the list. So two out of the top four responses--esteem and skills training--were a surprise.

We began to understand that over the years, priorities have changed. For young professionals, single or in relationships, job security may no longer be number one. For others with family responsibilities, it is. We sense, too, that workers have a great need now for more control over time, for the flexibility to balance the pressures and the stresses of working life with bringing up a family or leisure activities. Esteem and respect have become more important.

I soon made it a rule that a day-and-a-half a week I would leave the office and get out of London, if possible, to get around to different workplaces, and to listen to all kinds of different groups. What I heard about labor relations was often very different from the conflict model described in the newspapers. I found people engaged in creative deals, helping one another through very difficult problems, among them the huge job losses in manufacturing--another trend that you have seen in the United States.

Some ingenious things are being done in industrial relations, some high trust relationships are being built. Yet we do not talk about those a lot in the union world. We did not celebrate the good agreement, the deal, we did not celebrate the good relationship; we celebrated the strike, we celebrated the conflicts. But we were not doing very well at those conflicts in the 1980s, against a very strong Prime Minister who was determined never to allow militant unions to win anything, no matter what it might cost the state.

The survey and the changes in the workplaces we observed led us to put an emphasis on the partnership agenda, and on the skills agenda. But those were not the only two factors; there were other reasons as well. Nothing upsets me more in our debates than the assertion that that you can only do one thing in the unions. The reality is that you need a militant approach with some employers in some circumstances. You certainly need a strong emphasis on organizing, and we have borrowed from AFL-CIO when it comes to training organizers and getting unions to put more money into organizing. But there are other situations where different approaches are useful. We are in a very complex labor market, with all kinds of people with different attitudes, and we need many different ways to approach them.

While we recognized that the strike is an important weapon in the union arsenal, we also needed to try to get the Labour Party elected, and to make some friends outside Labour. Even the Conservative Party was not hostile on all issues.

We wanted to present the TUC as something interesting, something unusual. What we developed was a mixed brew. It didn't translate easily into a mission statement. There was something in it for the militants, something for the moderates--it spanned the union political spectrum quite effectively. It can be criticized perhaps for lack of focus, but in a labor market as complex as today's you need a variety of approaches.

This brings us to partnership and skills development. The partnership agenda has had some difficulties in our British unions. There are some people who have been elected to leadership positions in the trade union movement recently who do not like it much. It sounds like collaboration, with all the French 1940's feel that word evokes. It has been attacked from the left, and they have plenty of ammunition. In the last decade executive pay has gone up in both of our countries. Pension arrangements are under attack. I am as militant about fighting to defend pensions as anybody in Britain, and this has to be a top union priority at the moment.

It is also true that partnerships can sometimes be sweetheart deals. Norman Willis, my predecessor, looked at the way some unions were dealing with incoming investors, mainly Japanese, and described it as a beauty contest. Various unions paraded their "moderation" on the catwalk in front of the men from Tokyo and Nagoya. It didn't do trade unionism any good. As I once put it, it was a good thing that slavery was illegal in Britain, or somebody might have been offering that. This process produced agreements that were sometimes called partnership agreements, but we at the TUC did not recognize all of them as genuine partnership agreements.

Partnership is not the partnership between a man and his dog. It is a relationship of equals, built on a recognition that both sides can actually do some damage to one another other. We created our own Partnership Institute so that we could promote what we considered this genuine form of partnership. This is what you might call a virtual institute--it is centered at the TUC, but it employs union staff, business consultants, employers and others who are well-respected to help people cope with change in our workplaces.

We have got a lot of good examples of partnerships that are working for us. The biggest employer of union labor in the private sector in Britain is Tesco, with over 100,000 members of the Shopworkers' Union in their stores. Barclays Bank has, like all banks, been reorganized in the wake of the electronic revolution, but has handled it in an extremely cooperative way with the unions concerned. Then there is the British Bakeries employing mainly night workers, people slogging away through

the night to put fresh bread on the breakfast table. Their problems are very different from those of bank staff and saleswomen and men. We have employed the partnership approach to help all involved exercise some flexibility at the workplace so that in the middle of the night, when a supervisor has a row with the shop steward, the work isn't shut down by an unofficial strike. We have about 60 other partnerships like these, led by workers who are very proud of what they have achieved and committed to resolving issues with minimal disruption either to pay or output.

That brings me to "skills," because skills only really fits in when you have a relationship with an employer in which you can talk about things other than pay and effort. British bargaining in the periods of higher conflict was all about pay vs. effort--what you got for what you did. If you hope to broaden the collective bargaining agenda you must establish a more relaxed relationship. Both sides have to be willing to experiment. Not everything that is achieved can be seen as an inviolate right that must be defended at all costs. We are the oldest labor movement in the world, and have been through a lot of it, but handling change is still very difficult.

In the area of skills development we have a similar tradition to that of the United States. Here, too, apprenticeship has been central to the craft unions. From the beginning, unions too had an affection for liberal education, and encouraged bright team members to go on with education, to learn more. We have both provided access to adult education: second chance education is something that came in early in the workers' educational movements. And, especially in the last 20 to 30 years, we have given a lot of attention to providing high quality training to our own union leadership cadres, be they shop stewards or full-time officers.

Two significant developments came along in the late 1980's. One actually was made in America--in Detroit. We took up the example of the Ford agreement with the United Auto Workers (UAW) to establish a community college in Detroit. When they were downsizing in the early 1980's they found that many workers had a vast problem of literacy and numeracy. They had the good sense to form a college to provide people with skills so they would be employable somewhere else. This Ford experiment was brought to Britain. There was no need to form an entirely new college, because we already have public continuing education colleges. Our unions got more closely involved with those institutions. Every Ford worker in Britain got 200 pounds a year as a budget for his or her own learning. They could do with it what they wanted to, with the understanding that they should use it for skills upgrade with an eye toward long-term employability.

I have been a frequent visitor over the years to the plant in Liverpool that now makes Jaguars. I was very impressed when I heard that 80% of the workers had taken up the offer. (I was a bit less impressed when I found that 20% of that 80% were in golf driving classes). But we are trying to change a culture; we are making progress, but there is a lot of work to be done. Despite some flaws, the value of the Jaguar program is proving itself. A factory where nothing could be changed without a terrible argument is now producing very successful Jaguar models, and finds change quite easy. The union is not weaker as a result--the union is stronger. Most importantly, the plant is still there, when many others that could not change have shut their doors.

I am the Honorary Vice President of Scottish Power Learning. Scottish Power is important in America's northwestern states as an electricity generator. We are trying replicate the experiences here that we have had in Scottish Power back home. There we are up to about 70% participation in our training and education programs, which are notable for requiring employees to undertake some learning on their own time. All this grew out of that American idea, pioneered by the UAW.

My other example is more homespun, but you'll recognize that it also has taken hold in many places in America. There was a particular plant in the Liverpool area that made the bodywork for trucks. It had six changes of ownership in five years. It was worth nothing. There were strikes every other week; everyone was in despair. A new managing director came in and asked the union district leadership what could possibly be done: "I am only going to be here for six months, and if I do no better than my predecessors, then this plant is going to be closed." The union leaders said that the workforce were not very good at what they were doing and didn't really have any idea about what was needed. The company brought the shop stewards in and had the same discussion with them. They too were in the dark. The stewards explained that workers were always being asked to take up new production methods, like just-in-time, or to follow new management techniques, but they were never really clear about what the managers were talking about. They asked, "What does all this really mean for us?"

The TUC regional education officer, who was based in Liverpool, was brought in and asked to lay on some training. He brought in a tutor who virtually lived with the workers for a bit, and made sure they got courses on every new technique the company wanted to introduce. Then they went into contract negotiations when they understood their problem. They came out with an agreement, and taken another, and the company is now thriving: relationships are good and strikes are almost non-existent. So we found that through learning we could produce a lot of other benefits, including a much better relationship between union and management. We sought to spread that lesson.

Let's go back for a moment to that worker who did not do very well at school, and was being challenged with the words "lifelong learning." We found out--again, by accident--that when an employer says you need to upgrade your skills to be equipped for the new technology of the future, many workers shy away, become scared. They worry that they will be next on the restructuring list. But when the union tells them about learning, they will listen without trepidation.

Computers have been a great vehicle for engaging our people in skills development, because older workers want to get their hands on them when they see young people working with them. We have all sorts of projects going on in this area. For example, British Bakeries was the most unpromising territory for skills development, because there were so many literacy problems. But the unions found a role as a kind of guardian. We didn't set up the kind of pass-fail situation that people face in school examinations. We instead allowed workers to take classes on their own time, at their own pace. The union supported them all the way through it. It has been a terrific thing.

One of the few things we were able to accomplish under 18 years of Tory rule was to impress them with what we did on this issue-- bringing into the learning world people who were miles outside it. We even got some money from them. Now you have Dubya down in the White House, and a Republican Congress. I don't want to draw too close a parallel, but in this area, we were able to get some money from a Conservative government. They were concerned about this problem, and your government may be as well.

Our vocational learning systems in Britain were not comparable to some of those in the European Union, certainly not those in Germany. Many in our production work were not up to the levels of those in the Asian countries either, so we could capitalize on a widely- recognized problem. The government was aware that seven million adults in Britain have a literacy problem, out of a total population of 60 million--a huge problem. Too many people have not done well at school.

By 1997, when the Labour Party came into power, the unions had proved very effective in reaching out with basic educational skills to illiterate workers, like some of the bakery workers. The employers were supportive, because things were happening that would not have happened without union support. The TUC was employing staff on the regional and local level to go out and spread the message. With government support a union learning fund was created, with about £10 million annually. Unions can apply for modest amounts, in what have to be joint applications with employers, who pay for part of the programs themselves.

The next idea we developed was the concept of the union learning representative. We wanted to dispel the idea that to be a shop steward and union activist was to set yourself up for victimization by the employer, rather than to benefit. We wanted to establish roles for shop stewards that allowed them to take part in activities that did not always involve conflict with employers. We needed to find a different way to recruit a new next generation of union representatives. We are hoping that learning can be a way to do this, and we are making progress in this area. The union learning rep position is kind of a halfway house on the way to becoming a shop steward. We already have about 3,000 union learning reps—it is moving quite quickly. They are soon going to be given government-sanctioned status--anywhere a union is recognized it will be entitled by law to appoint learning reps. They will be given time off by the employer, and facilities to do their jobs. You will not hear too many union activists saying "thank you" to the Labour government for these steps, because that is not the political mood at the moment. But they are important steps.

There are now 60 TUC staff employed full-time in this area. All of them are paid by public funds. This is quite helpful, but it also worries us. If the government changes, a lot of this could be undone. But at the moment it is quite popular, and has full government support. The Learning and Skills Council is a public administrative body that oversees all this in England. I have recently become its Vice Chairman, and Chairman of its Adult Committee. So the unions are integrally involved in our whole system of vocational training. Would we pay for what the unions are doing out of our own resources if we lost government support? We couldn't afford to on the same scale. But there are a lot of people who have come up through this route now, young people who are enthusiastic and also would fight to keep it in the union budget.

What has been the overall effect of our efforts in partnership and training on the strategic situation of the British labor movement? The picture is mixed. I can certainly point to examples of how this activity has been successful in particular workplaces. But, overall, union membership has only stabilized—even though we have had a very buoyant labor market. We are still experiencing losses in manufacturing, and we have problems of density in some areas of public service. The need for a vital organizing program is absolutely crucial. We have been going through a period of union mergers, when unions tend to focus internally. The maneuvers vis-à-vis the Blair government can be consuming. People too easily lose sight of the hard, nitty-gritty work of organizing.

When it comes to increasing membership, I can point to examples where strikes and other traditional union strategies have helped, as well as to situations in which lifelong learning and partnership have helped. Some people make successes of certain things, and others do not. Where the partnership and learning agenda has clearly helped is in collective bargaining. We have been able to get agreements that entail flexibility for people on production line jobs, and give them some choices, some sense of self-respect and control. We are also hanging on a lot better to decent pension arrangements—even improving them in some cases--than we were when there was an atmosphere of greater conflict.

Employers would often put pension cuts on the list just to have something else to use in the conflicts they knew they would have with us.

I believe partnership and learning is now an important part of the TUC agenda, and will grow as the new European Directive on Information and Consultation comes into force. This EU rule will apply to British employers in the year 2005, with some variations according to a company's size. It requires management to inform the workers' representatives before making major changes, so there can be some opportunity to influence those changes. This is a big departure from the shareholder-value principal that has been so overwhelmingly powerful in both our countries. It will give workers some say in the rules of the game, which have been rigged against us in recent years.

There are other ways the partnership and learning agenda can be important to our future. Our unions have a great need to appeal to workers in the new workforce. There has been a huge growth of service occupations in both of our countries, not just at the bottom end, but also in the professional and skilled fields. Some of these jobs are hard to define, but just ask people what their kids do and you'll get some interesting answers. The names our unions go by often reflect the world of work as it was in the 1960's, not what it is today. One thing I leave the TUC with regrets about is that I have not been able to convince the General Council of the TUC that we should have one highly visible Internet-based information service to bring people halfway towards the union movement. Such a thing would do much more to reach out to the professional/technical group of workers that Morty Bahr is so concerned about.

All these issues now go to my successor, Brendan Barber. He will have to bring along the group of union leaders who do not always agree with some of the things I have spoken about so positively here today. He will also have to deal with figures in our government who can be careless toward those who have supported them in ways that Bill Clinton never was, and who have an exaggerated respect for business (which you might say Bill Clinton shared) that makes them too cautious in some matters.

At a time when corporate reputations are falling we in labor and on the left of center and center should be speaking up more vigorously with new ideas. For example, there is a sense that the public sector in Britain could be privatized along American lines. These new public/private partnerships can lead to lower conditions for staff. So far, we have not found the ways to negotiate through the problems. So we have a resurgent militancy around some matters in the public sector or areas like transportation, which are not going to take off to China or Central Europe.

I am leaving now to fight the battle for social dialogue and true partnership across the whole of Europe, particularly in emerging democracies and economies where there have been no traditions of this kind. To seek to uphold the European social model against the shareholder value model associated with Wall Street and the City of London and every business school in both our countries. To do this I've had to adopt the principle of lifelong learning for myself – at the moment, I'm learning French. As I said to Brendan Barber on his election as General Secretary-Elect at the TUC General Council in December, "Après moi, le déluge."

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

MODERATOR: Morton Bahr, *President, Communication Workers of America*:

Thank you so much, the floor is open.

Sam Leiken, *consultant, New Economy Information Service*:

I may be the only person here who has read the collected works of John Monks, because, on behalf of the New Economy Information Service, I recently went to the UK to look at how their unions deal with lifelong learning. The result appears in an article in their workforce development book* called "Classroom Struggle Unionism." In a speech you gave to the business school at Leeds University you noted that unions now have the capacity to provide individual services to individual workers. Both in the United States and in the UK there are large numbers of workers who are unaffiliated to any union, many of them former union members, who are nevertheless positively inclined towards unions. They have no readily-available way to connect to unions organizationally. They also have very little access to lifelong learning, or to expert help in getting the kinds of services that they need. Is it conceivable that unions could attract not only workplace-based union members but also individual union members who need various services that the market does not efficiently provide?

John Monks:

Unions are essentially collective. The idea of your individual union officer giving you advice at your elbow all the way through your working life is lovely, but it's not practical. The Dutch Federation, the FNV, did try something along these lines. They set up a special unit and advertised it quite extensively. It was in the bottom right-hand corner of a lot of newspapers: "the FNV, your agent." They took over the term from the movie stars and footballers – "your agent."

It's going to be difficult to deliver on that. The economics of unions make it hard for us to offer professional services to individuals. The best we can do is train shop stewards and learning reps to be aware of the kinds of opportunities that exist.

Morton Bahr:

Let me add something, because our union is working on something along the lines Sam mentioned in two companies – IBM and Microsoft – that are hardly pro-union companies. High-level technical workers and engineers may not think they have a reason to belong to unions. But, almost without exception, they belong to professional organizations. We've done a lot of research in this. We want our union to offer in a non-collective bargaining scenario the same kinds of services and educational opportunities these employees get from professional organizations. These employees do not respond to the traditional ways of organizing low-paid workers, and expect something else. They do want esteem in the workplace, ways to deal with high-level management and assistance in career development. But when you get into this area you have to make a long-term commitment before you can see results.

Marshall Goldberg, *Joint Labor-Management Educational Programs Association*

I had the opportunity to go to the UK in 1992 when the last government launched something called "Investing in People." Was there a seat at the table for the trade union movement in the legislation that set up "Investing in People"? That was a time when your government was not exactly union-friendly. How did that program work, and were you able to use it for the benefit of your membership?

John Monks:

Investing In People is a simple concept. Employees are supposed to be aware of where a company is going, where they fit in and what training and development employees need in order to do their jobs. It's a "badge" that companies can apply for if they conduct this program with the TUC, and demonstrate that they are doing their bit. This was a very hard program to get started back in 1993. But eventually it got wide acceptance, even from the Conservative government. It showed that the unions were committed to learning.

The program is not established in legislation -- it's all voluntary. You apply for it and you can get a bit of money to help if you're a small firm. At the moment, about 40% of British employees are covered by "Investors in People." Its weaknesses, we would say, are that it's not pro-active enough on equality of opportunity, it's not pro-active enough in setting up systems of qualifications and transferable skills that enable a person who has undertaken training to use it if the company goes under and he or she is thrown out into the world. We're trying to improve the program -- we're now on the board and very much engaged in it.

Penn Kemble, *Senior Scholar, Freedom House; consultant, New Economy Information Service:*

The words that one might use to describe your presentation are constructive, modest, cooperative and skeptical--things I find quite attractive. But if you put your partnership and lifelong learning ideas up against people in the labor movement who are angry--sometimes with considerable justification--and whose anger is often alloyed with a kind of ideological militancy that is not always reasonable, you may well lose. In fact, there's whispering that you're leaving the TUC because this agenda has already lost out. As you put it, the deluge is coming. How do you answer that?

John Monks:

That's not the reason I'm leaving. The battle you describe is one that goes on all the time in the labor movement. The pragmatic vs. militant debate goes back to the very origins of trade unionism, and is one that swings one way and then swings the other. I'm very philosophical about that. The challenge to Brendan will be something like this: we managed to have a major row with the Labour government in 1969, and went on to lose the election in 1970. We managed to do it again in 1979, and then lost the election in 1979. Brendan won't want to be the General Secretary who presides over that "hat trick" any more than I would.

We face a real risk because of disputes in the public sector, the socialized, non-market sector. When that's the epicenter of disputes, you don't have to be from a right-wing business school to acknowledge that it's the socialist bit that's not working. The private sector is not doing too badly. It's handling change, people in partnership agreements and so forth. You may have noticed that I didn't cite any public sector examples of good partnership in the ones I gave. There are some, but they're small compared to the more spectacular ones like Tesco, Barclays and the British Bakeries.

The struggle to find a proper balance between militancy and partnership is quite a battle, and it'll go on long after both Brendan Barber and I are gone. We're trying to establish the labor movement as the natural place for workers to be in a very changed labor market--one that is not based on the mine, the mill, the big factory or even the big socialized public services. You need a lot of different weapons to use in achieving this. I've skewed my remarks around partnership and learning, but that is an emphasis that could change. If employers keep trying to wriggle out of pension schemes, and if they continue to pay themselves these huge amounts on an accelerating basis, then partnership will become extremely difficult.

During the 1990's we found that we could use different approaches for different employers, and some of them didn't fit familiar rhetorical patterns. I'm quite ready to step up and defend what we've done. We got some good agreements. We've got better relations and we're doing things that are effective together. This is something that we need to make clear, so that it's not just the militant posture that gets the credit.

Bruce Olsson, *HPWO Partnerships Department, International Association of Machinists*:

I'm with the machinists' union, and I work with a department that helps our local unions set up labor management partnerships with their employers. I was impressed with your comments that partnership is just one tool to be used in dealing with employers, and that its usefulness depends on a particular situation. Strikes are certainly appropriate at certain times. I have a couple of questions. One is that at your Partnership Institute you say you use business consultants in some of your work. Our experience has been that when we're dealing with workplace change the rank and file is very skeptical of business consultants, because they believe they carry out the agenda of management, which in many cases aims at eliminating our members' jobs. What is the accountability process that you have for those management consultants? Do you review their work on any type of regular basis? Can you remove them if you feel they have acted inappropriately?

My second question: your Partnership Institute, as I understand it, comes under the new unionism sector of the TUC, which has to do with organizing. Have you been able to make this work for what we call "front door organizing"? In this country we have to fight through many legal and other obstacles to organize a new workplace. Our hope is that through partnership we might be able to walk in when a new facility has opened up and offer better relationships with employers so we can organize right from the very beginning. We've had very limited success with this. Harley Davidson had been one example. Are there examples in the British experience?

John Monks:

There can be tension between the Organizing Academy at the TUC and the Partnership Institute. The Organizing Academy is naturally pulled more toward the rough end of the labor market, with exploitative employers. These are kids who often come with a militant outlook, who are angry about the conditions many people are working under. The Partnership group is working in circumstances where there is a shared willingness to improve those conditions. As you have noted, we think both groups have important roles to play. A union needs to do both things, to be capable of acting in both theaters.

But this necessity can cause conflicts within a union staff, and these can become political from time to time. One of my tasks has been to argue that both are aspects of the whole, and that we have to appeal to different groups in the labor market. On the other question, consultants go as TUC associates into the various workplaces, and they're accountable for both elements of our over-all strategy. For every task they take on there is a review process with the union. If they don't get good marks they won't be used again. If we are using people with business backgrounds, they have to deal with union needs. But our organizers and consultants also have to know how to keep the employer on board if partnership is going to be successful.

Anthony Carnevale, *Educational Testing Service*:

In America, it seems that we only discuss adult training seriously when we are dealing with broad economic issues like trade in which training is offered as a trade-off for jobs. That is, you allow jobs to go overseas, or eliminate them with technology, and then give those who have lost jobs training.

But this approach deals only with the short-term. And when people who represent workers are forced to choose between jobs and training, of course they choose jobs.

One way to overcome this short-term approach is to give training and education greater attention from the bottom up, by getting workers involved before their jobs are at risk. This is what is being done by leaders like Morty Bahr. But it may also be possible again to develop concern at the top about longer-term strategies. That can happen as trade issues become more and more important in the private sector, and if there's a scarcity of competent labor.

In the United States an important turning point will be reached in about three years: the rapid retirement of the baby boom generation. More than 46 million American workers over the age of 55 or 60 who are currently employed and who have education or training beyond high school--especially males--will be retiring in droves between now and 2020. There may be a fundamental scarcity of skilled labor. Macroeconomic projections suggest a general labor supply problem that in gross terms is larger than is generally imagined. One has to assume that people who retire keep eating, so the demand for labor remains fairly robust. So you either fill demand by reaching offshore, or you have to do other things--like re-training.

Trade policy may have to be altered in a fairly serious way to adjust to an economy with scarce labor. I wonder whether Europeans are thinking about this kind of situation?

John Monks:

We have some similarities in our labor markets. We are a long way from full employment, because we've got pockets of high unemployment. Nevertheless, the most noticeable thing in the British labor market at the moment is the shortage in the skilled crafts. After systems engineers in computing and all that, skilled craftsmen are our big problem area. A shortage of plumbers is one of our main problems. This extends to Scotland and the north of England and South Wales, where unemployment is traditionally higher than in the south of England. So we're learning to live with something you here have always had to deal with: waves of immigration in the construction trades.

We've not had immigration from the Republic of Ireland, given the fantastic growth rates they have had. But we're now receiving large numbers of building tradesmen from Central and Eastern Europe, going beyond Poland into the Ukraine and Russia. It was quite a shock to come into the TUC building six months ago to find a team of Ukrainian electricians doing the rewiring of one of our rooms. The union membership inquiries are still outstanding on them.

High employment levels are pulling people into countries of the European Union. The Netherlands is a good case in point: its population went from nine million to 19 million since the Second World War. It's not a very big area. Immigration is a major factor in meeting skill shortages and making up for a decreasing birthrate and an aging population. It's socially difficult in parts of the country, and we have had some race riots, especially in some of the old northern towns. Unions have a big job to do to help our country embrace immigrants as full workers. That's our stance, not the protectionist one of trying to keep them out. You're not going to keep them out, because the Channel is as porous as the Rio Grande. Their assimilation will be both politically and economically important.

Birth rates in Britain are low. Birth rates in the traditionally Catholic countries are even lower – now even in the Republic of Ireland. Huge changes are taking place. Only three parts of the world are

magnets for the rest – North America, Western Europe, and Australia and New Zealand. Immigration will be a major problem for unions to handle.

Morton Bahr:

We've got jobs going in both directions. There are tens of thousands of call center workers in India today. Most of the companies here are doing this quietly. When you call the 800 number for a variety of services the worker at the other end does not identify where he or she is located. Companies, particularly in India, are training workers to lose their Indian accent. They already have the English language ability, so in training school they sit hour-after-hour watching Laverne & Shirley videos. So don't be surprised when all the call center responses sound like they are located in Flatbush, Brooklyn.

Let me offer an observation before we thank John. What we didn't mention was how fragile partnership agreements are. We see this from our own experience. We began ours in 1980 with AT&T, the old Bell system, which had over half a million workers. As John explained, partnerships opened up many doors that had been closed. We established The Alliance for Employee Growth and Development, an educational corporation owned jointly by the company and the union, and funded it through collective bargaining. The Bell system's management changed, after a man named Bob Allen left. Mike Armstrong came in, and the system disappeared overnight. But what is incredible is that not only AT&T but all the other companies followed a similar pattern: education and training has never been held hostage by either the company or the union. It has survived strikes, lockouts, and all sorts of disputes because it has become ingrained in the culture, and neither side is willing to jeopardize it. We have been able to get a number of the companies together where the unions – CWA and the IBEW – are the only thing they have in common.

We have worked together with Pace University -- using an initial grant from the Sloan Foundation -- to deliver education online. We now have about 5 telecom companies in this consortia, many of whom compete with each other in a variety of ways. This means that when one of our members graduates with a degree certifying her at a certain level, she can move across the country to get a job based on that credential.

The frustration that we really have is that the companies and the unions that have been involved in fostering these partnership agreements over the last 15 years or have been stuck on a plateau. We have not grown much on the labor side, and we certainly haven't grown on the employer side. One of the ideas the Shanker Institute and the New Economy Information Service have been discussing is how we can open the dialogue up to more people. We tend to preach to the choir. Now we need to find some way to persuade our colleagues on the union side as well as those on the employer side that this approach is worth trying.

I myself was once a skeptic. The only reason I bought into the idea in 1980 is I was on the national bargaining committee that negotiated it. But I really didn't believe in it. But because I was on the committee, and Vice President out of New York, I thought we owed it a try. I went in with tongue-in-cheek, saying "show me." I quickly became a convert when I saw the doors that opened. I've been sold ever since.

Please join me in thanking John Monks for a great presentation and dialogue.