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Partners in the Future of
Work and Learning**



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The issues raised in this symposia need to be dealt with. Neither the labor movement nor industry in this country can afford a period of industrial strife and dispute. The international competition we face is so great that there's no guarantee that we will make it, even if there's cooperation. If there's conflict and dispute, we may end up where everybody loses. The key is to develop new ways of working, new working arrangements that are different than the ones that we've had traditionally.

Neither labor nor management is really ready on an international basis for those changes of relationships. For management, there's an underlying feeling that if there's a union, they've done something wrong, that the very existence and presence of a union is a failure. Somehow management did something wrong, or otherwise our workers wouldn't have unionized.

And on the part of unions, there is a feeling that we know that workers need a union. If they're going to engage in a war with management, then they need a union. But do you really need a union if you're going to cooperate with management? This is a basic question that every union leader has to ask himself. We need to rethink what we're doing. One problem is that management in this country does not accept the legitimacy of unions, even where they have them. And yet, if we don't find a way of cooperating, the world will lose. We might not have an auto industry ten years from now, we might not have a steel industry. In my own field, if we don't radically improve education, we may not have public education in this country ten years from now.

The question that needs to be posed is what structures might we create in different fields and the role of higher education in trying to bring about new relationships, a new system where unions are more accepted than they are today by management. In exchange, the unions would be much more concerned with and flexible toward changes that would have to be made in order to preserve the industry and to make it competitive because of the stake that they have in it.

A couple of years ago, a number of us looking at what was happening to membership in the labor movement noticed what everybody has since noticed who reads newspapers and watches membership figures: membership in the labor movement has either stood still or has gone down in absolute numbers. In relative numbers, it's a lot worse in terms of percentage of the workforce organized. We asked ourselves whether we were doing certain things that are making this happen, and one of the questions was: does the concentration on adversarial relationships keep some workers out of the union movement? We looked at a lot of the polling data about why people work. When I asked my mother and father that when I was a kid they said, "Do you want to eat?" That was it. Do you want a roof over your head? It was simple. But today you ask people why they work and the first answer is I have certain abilities, I have a job, and I'm able to use them—referring to personal development, self-expression, and growth. Seven out of ten people are beyond that traditional brutal exchange of sweat.

So the union movement realized that an appeal only to the hungry, angry person who dislikes the job and wants only money in exchange for sweat, is an appeal to only a certain percentage of the work force. A larger and larger percentage of the work force will not opt for a union if they believe that the union will bring additional rules, regulations, constraints, restrictions on what they feel is a relationship with an employer, a relationship with colleagues, and an ability to have flexibility in their own work.

We have found that workers value collegiality. However, very few of those interviewed saw the union as a place where people talk to each other and exchange ideas. Yet, a sense of camaraderie and collegiality is the very thing that most of us who are in the unions highly value. It's something those outside the union movement don't see.

To get to the associate membership, we have to question our mode of organizing in recent years. The general polls show that about one-third of the people in the workforce say they would like to have a union. Now, by the rules of collective bargaining, we only represent workers in places where fifty-percent plus one want union membership. Therefore, if we only organize members into collective bargaining units, we are excluding a lot of people who really want to come with us. In effect, we are sending them a message which says you can only join us if you happen to work in a place where the majority of your co-workers want to join, otherwise we don't want you. Is that a wise policy? Shouldn't we find some way by which everyone who believes in our goals legislative agenda and wants our services can become a member? I believe the associate membership idea can enable us to have a labor movement of 30 million members instead

of 13 million, and that not all of the 30 million would be engaged in collective bargaining.