

## Has Facebook Swallowed Our History?

By Derek Blackadder, Columnist with *Our Times Magazine*, Canadian correspondent for the international labour news website LabourStart. July 2018.

Ever tried to go back any length of time and see what was happening on your Facebook feed? Not fun. But that's where you may find the near-to-only historical record of the organizing efforts around everything from your local's member mobilization efforts in the last round of bargaining through to how the Tim Horton's Day of Action came about.

If you can find it.

It's important to know who moved what motion about donating to a worthy cause (like the TWHP) at last April's local union meeting so it's a good thing that we record those kinds of things. But the other history, the "what we tried," "what worked" and "what didn't" stuff is hardly ever deliberately recorded. It just accumulates naturally. And that is where the fun stuff is.

How many of us have looked through a local's strike archives and found mostly financial records, and almost nothing about the formation of and decision-making by the informal flying picket that ambushed the bread-delivery van at 0400 hours every morning before heading over to the university president's house to give her a morning wake-up call?

That history isn't deliberately recorded. No one has the time to make sense of it all, let alone to write it up. It is just there: In a box full of paper leaflets. Or an archive CD in the retired backups storage box. Or a thumbdrive at the back of a desk drawer. Or off in a corner of the cloud where we keep the stuff we generate that we don't want to throw away, recycle or delete. At least it exists and we can learn from it, if need be.

But increasingly our history is buried deep in Facebook. And that presents a whole new set of problems.

The day Facebook folds or becomes something else or changes its terms of service, much of the history of the National Day of Action in Solidarity with Tim Hortons Workers will disappear. What we did, who did it, how they did it and

what the response was, even the photographic records of the signs and the people and the enthusiasm at the rallies will go poof!

Organizing is only half about the current struggle. It's also about building our capacity and improving our chances in the next one. No history, no learning. No learning, no victory. Most importantly, our history is built on our records, our archives. And our history is fun. No archive, no fun.

Yeah, yeah, I know. Facebook is like death and taxes. Let me just respond with: MySpace, Nortel, Eaton's, BlackBerry, Zellers, Corel, WordPerfect, Sears, bank tellers, home mail delivery and defined-benefit pension plans. Not to mention a growing exodus by the under-25 crowd who are finding Snapchat and Instagram more to their taste.

People tell me that generalizing from the personal is a sign of an immature personality. I respond to the people who tell me this as my grandfather Blackadder did: by inviting them to pull my finger.

Personally, I look at a lot of not just Canadian but also U.S., European, Australian, Indian and Nigerian unions' websites each week. So allow me to generalize.

Unions that would never throw away the paper records of their 1927 convention are consigning the records of their political action and organizing and solidarity work to the dustbin of Facebook. How many national union websites are there with nothing new on them? By new I mean less than a month old. Last I looked, the Washington-based website of an international union most recent news item was from the spring of 2017. What's there, if not current documents and topical photos? Links to Facebook posts and a rolling Twitter feed box. A display of content located elsewhere.

One shrug by the online organizing monopoly that is Facebook and it all evaporates. This isn't the place for talking about all the problems, immediate and potential, with our addiction to Facebook as an organizing tool. But let's not add 'it ate our history' to the list.

So start recording the history of actions on something other than Facebook.

And don't forget to pull my finger.