

# LEARNING, LABOUR AND ENVIRONMENTALISM: CANADIAN AND INTERNATIONAL PROSPECTS<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

*In this paper I argue that for those interested in green, sustainable development, attention needs to be paid to the workplace. It is here where issues of work and intervention by organized labour have an important, under-recognized role to play. Reviewing both Canadian and international governmental reports, union policy, adult education, and social movement-oriented research literature on environmental innovation and conflict, I claim that continued greening of the labour movement represents one of the key challenges of our time, and a key opportunity. Support for union-based educational programming and attention to (labour and environmentalist) activist informal learning are necessary to sustain this claim. The analysis suggests that environmental issues represent a powerful opportunity structure for organized labour that may support the achievement of new organizing momentum and social legitimacy—points that are not lost on the different local and parent unions nor federations, as evidenced by their attempts to reframe the role of organized labour in production vis-à-vis forms of green sustainable production. However, it is also noted that attempts at innovation face barriers in terms of the structure of national labour relations regimes and the dynamics of adult learning within inter-movement conflict.*

## Résumé

*Dans ce papier je me dispute que pour ces intéressés dans vert, le développement durable, les besoins d'attention être payé au lieu de travail. C'est ici où les problèmes de travail et l'intervention par le travail organisé ont un rôle important et sous-reconnu pour jouer. Réexaminer Canadien et les rapports gouvernementaux internationaux, la politique d'union, l'enseignement pour adultes, et le mouvement social—a orienté la littérature de recherche sur l'innovation et le conflit écologique, je réclame que la prise de conscience écologique continué du mouvement travailliste représente un des défis clés de notre temps, et une occasion clé. Le soutien pour union-basé la programme nationale et l'attention éducatives à (le travail et l'écologiste) l'activiste érudition simple est nécessaire*

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*de soutenir cette réclamation. L'analyse suggère que les problèmes écologiques représentent une structure d'occasion puissante pour le travail organisé que peut soutenir l'accomplissement du nouvel organiser élan et de légitimité sociale—les points qui ne sont pas perdus sur les différents locaux et unions de parent ni les fédérations, comme témoigné par leurs tentatives pour recadrer le rôle de travail organisé dans la production vis-à-vis des formes de production viable verte. Cependant, il est aussi noté que tente aux barrières de visage d'innovation dans les termes de la structure de régimes de relations travaillistes nationaux et la dynamique d'érudition d'adulte dans le conflit d'inter-mouvement.*

### Introduction

Since workplaces are centres of production, as well as major consumers in their own right, it follows that they must be assigned a central role in any strategy for such thoroughgoing change. This situates the debate on sustainable development directly in the historical objectives of trade unions, which can be described by the concepts of integration, engagement and transformation. (Gereluk & Royer, 2001, p. 2)

While a focus on the role of public environmental education, the consumer, and the eco-entrepreneur has often captured the imaginations of those interested in green, sustainable development, disproportionately less attention has been paid to date to positive contributions rooted in the efforts of organized labour at and beyond the point of production (i.e., the workplace).

In this article I offer a synthesis of several disparate bodies of literature—union studies, environmentalism research, and adult learning research—that are not regularly brought together. The underlying theoretical approach to this synthesis is based on historical materialism; that is, it is an orientation that foregrounds the need to pay attention to transformations of the mode of production in relation to the contradictions between socialized and privatized interests, as well as the forms of collective organization and adult learning that make such transformations possible. These forms of collective organization include organized labour and environmental movements.

Specifically, I review Canadian and international union policy documents, labour relations literature, and a select set of social movement-oriented and adult education research literature on environmental innovation and conflict involving labour. The conceptual perspectives and/or preoccupations that inform the different bodies of literature reviewed here are diverse. In the union policy literature, a concern for institutional capacity and organized educational programming are central, and both informal learning and inter-movement conflict remain largely invisible. Labour relations scholarship offers detailed comparative information on law, institutional structures, and collective bargaining, but fails to register either deviations from such legacies or how inter-movement conflict/cooperation bear on the achievement of broader environmental goals. Within ethnographic accounts of environmental degradation and community responses, a concern for the interaction between emergent social movements, corporations, and the state are the focus, while issues of learning remain largely unaddressed and the role of organized labour is marginal at

best. Finally, in selected examples of adult education research—whether they are dealing with organized labour, the environmental movement, or instances of their conflict or cooperation—we see only minor instances of the recognition of progressive union policies or their effects on labour relations legacies and the workplace.

The synthesis responds to these gaps. It attempts to reveal the range of progressive, yet little-known, activities that Canadian labour engages in across the public and private sectors, with particular attention to collective bargaining and policy proposals. I identify a need for greater research attention to union-based educational programming and, in particular, (labour and environmentalist) activist informal learning. In terms of the latter, I emphasize the in situ, social movement-based learning that goes where labour and environmental movements meet over practical issues, protest, and action (legal or otherwise). Finally, I demonstrate that attempts at environmental innovation related to the workplace face two key barriers: (1) the barriers endemic to labour relations regimes, and (2) the barriers expressed through the dynamics of inter-movement conflict.

Below, I begin by briefly situating North America in the contemporary global-environmental context with a focus on consumption and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. It becomes clear that North America is one among several regions of the globe where serious change is crucial, and that market-based solutions offer limited hope. Next, I turn toward an international comparative discussion of labour relations regimes to show how and why these regimes represent a key barrier facing progressive change at the point of production. Following a summary of current policy and specific initiatives that unions have undertaken to counter environmental degradation in Canada, I turn to a discussion of education as a key component for developing capacity for change. Here, I take time to draw distinctions between organized educational activity and less-often discussed informal learning. We see that informal learning, in particular, shapes and informs the spaces where environmental and labour movements meet: spaces that are crucial for the development of alternative programs of economic and social development.

### **Situating the Environmental Crisis: The Global Context**

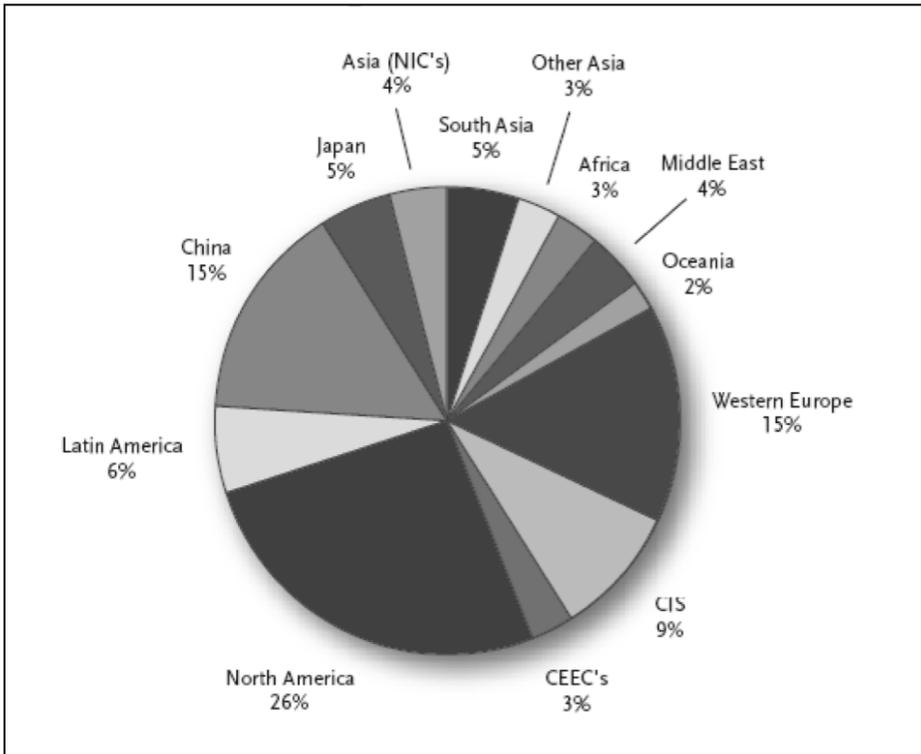
Extended discussion of the global environmental context can be found in a variety of sources, which I will not review here. By way of introduction, however, I simply note that the challenges are complex and, minimally, include questions about nuclear energy, fresh water supply, severe weather, agribusiness production techniques, waste, and deforestation. However, at the centre of virtually all of these matters is the issue of energy use as assessed through CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. According to European Environment Agency reports (e.g., 2003), while the share of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions has been shifting (e.g., accelerated output in China<sup>2</sup>), what is clear is that North America remains one of the global regions with the highest overall levels of consumption, energy use, and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. More disturbingly, over the last decade, unlike Western Europe and similar to both China and India, North America has continued to increase its levels of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, with these patterns roughly holding in terms of per capita measures (see Figures 1 and 2).

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2 According to *The New York Times* (May 9, 2007, p. C1), China is expected to surpass the United States' CO<sub>2</sub> output by 2008.

Figure 1: Global CO<sub>2</sub> Emissions (2002)

From European Trade Union Confederation (2004, p. 9).

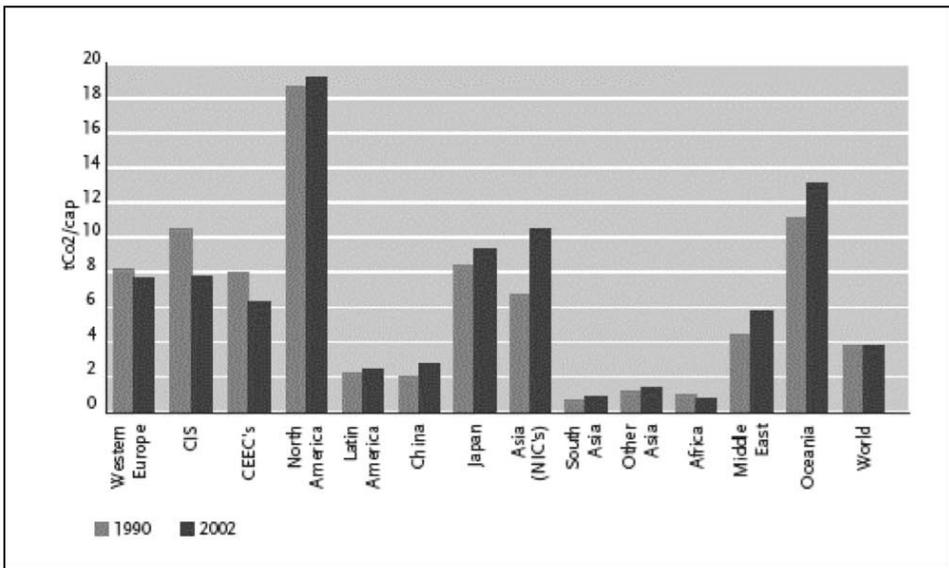


At first glance, solutions appear elusive or, at the very least, overwhelming. Market-inspired solutions—such as the United Nations' (UN) greenhouse gas international credit exchange program known as the Clean Development Mechanism—also do not seem to offer much hope. In 2006, this UN program led to \$4.8 billion in credit transfers. But, while enjoying modest success in encouraging more wind turbines and secondary processing (e.g., recovery of methane gas from landfill), it has not led to the kind of progressive changes expected. Notably, the countries of Africa have been virtually unaffected by the program to date. At the same time, China, followed by India, Brazil, and South Korea, have continued to see their CO<sub>2</sub> emission levels grow precipitously while taking active part in the program.

What becomes clear is that non-market interventions are required. In the face of questionable state commitments in countries like Canada and the United States, and recent failures to establish binding international regulation, pressure for positive change will likely have to come from below—from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), environmental movements, and other citizen groups, as well as from organized labour.

**Figure 2: Global Changes in CO2 Emissions by Country/Region**

From European Trade Union Confederation (2004, p. 9).



### **International Comparative Labour Relations and the Link to Union Environmental Action**

Despite all differences in terms of political power, member structure and internal organization [and] societal function, labour unions clearly represent a key actor in the process towards more sustainable production and consumption patterns. This is particularly true as the successful implementation of changes in the working environment to a large extent depends on the knowledge, support, and acceptance of workers / employees. (Heins, 2004, p. 3)

Accelerated patterns of environmental degradation and energy use should be and, in fact, are legitimate points of reference for labour movements in Canada and elsewhere. However, to understand the potential for unions in these terms it is important to assess the institutional labour relations regimes in which they are embedded. These regimes shape the limits and possibilities of labour strategy on the environment.

While international comparative analysis is always challenging, it is still possible, according to the recent overview provided in Godard (2005)<sup>3</sup>, to point out that Canada generally stands out among advanced capitalist countries in terms of its labour relations regime and related socio-economic indicators. In several ways it is unique in its positioning between laissez faire systems represented primarily by the American model and the more

3 Godard (2005) draws on Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development and United Nations source data.

centralized, often tripartite system of labour relations that still tend to characterize many Western European and all Northern European countries. The specific activities of Canadian labour will be discussed in a moment, but by way of comparison and given the fact that environmental crisis is global in nature, it is important to say a bit more about the European and American models to understand union roles and responses. In part due to the remaining rights of workers to participate in production decisions—whether these originate in codetermination rights in Northern Europe or through representation via the European Works Councils across Western Europe—at the local level, European unions appear to have required less direct local action and innovation compared to Canadian unions (see Royer, 2006). In the European labour movements, there appears to be much more attention paid to policy and international institution-building. Indeed, through this centralized approach, European unions have led the way in terms of policy and strategic thinking regarding workers and the environment, having noticeably intensified with the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, where they became initially involved in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). In this context, the involvement of unions in environmental issues has been built around a set of principles that have continued to grow more distinct and more directive, including programs aimed at green responses rooted in principles of social justice; e.g., “. . . guaranteeing equal access to natural resources, revenue and technologies for all countries both North and South, creating high-quality well-paid and sustainable jobs, preventing risks and ensuring that the burden of change is evenly distributed” (European Trade Union Confederation [ETUC], 2004, p. 3).

Indeed, according to Gill (1995), this corporatist impulse has helped establish functional partnerships between the state, capital, labour, and environmentalists, and continues to remain viable.

Comparatively, the labour relations regime in the United States supports decentralization and, broadly speaking, deunionization. Governmental enforcement of labour protections, whether at the federal or state level, is highly limited. Local, rather than national, social bargaining sets the basic limits and possibilities for progressive change. In turn, the labour movement in the United States, while it has formally decried federal environmental policies, has tended to direct its efforts toward combinations of individual unions, environmental organizations, and private business interests (see Hoerner, 2000), making it distinct from the European response. A key example in this regard is United Steelworkers and Sierra Club’s Blue-Green Alliance (Parks, 2006). The Blue-Green Alliance’s New Vision for America campaign, for example, targets municipal governments in major urban centres, and in the 1990s gave birth to the Alliance for Sustainable Jobs and the Environment (ASJE). In close connection to the ASJE is the Apollo Alliance, a \$300 billion organization aiming “to liberate the US economy and [its] national security from dependence on fossil fuels” (2007). The Apollo Alliance is composed primarily of individual union affiliates and municipal labour councils working hand-in-hand with business leaders. Resourced at the level it is, the Apollo Alliance has caught the attention of the U.S. Senate and Congress, but according to Turner (2006), it can still be contrasted to the strategies and initiatives found within European labour movements as a “coalition of influence” rather than a “coalition of protest” (p. 92) with limited effects on either governmental policy or the products and processes of work itself.

In Canada, however, we find a relatively distinct model of labour relations and, accordingly, a distinct union-environmentalist response. The contemporary Canadian labour relations regime was established in the World War Two era (i.e., with Privy Council Act 1003 (P.C. 1003)). It was at this time that the struggle of workers established a stable dues payment system (i.e., Rand Formula), institutional legitimacy, and a more even playing field in terms of union recognition rights. Canadian labour has established a functional national and provincial federation system, and, with the establishment of the New Democratic Party in the 1960s, unions achieved a formal voice in electoral politics. At the same time, it is important to note that P.C. 1003 ushered in a legacy that limited the participation of unions in work design, technology, and product development decisions. Adding to this, Canadian labour relations over the past 30 years have been given to what Panitch and Swartz (1993) called “permanent exceptionalism”—a process through which the state has consistently upheld the withdrawal of union rights. It is this historical legacy that has funneled Canadian union activities into the forms they have begun to take over the last decade—a decade that has seen growing pressure to breach significant areas of management rights through attempts at green bargaining.

Against this backdrop, in Canada we see a mix of European and American labour relations legacies in terms of a globally unique combination of individual union and labour federation strategies on the environment—a mix of centralization and decentralization. As we shall see in the next section, Canadian unions have taken up the challenge of decentralized bargaining for green initiatives at the workplace level. However, when compared to the United States, we also see that Canadian labour is a much stronger participant in the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and the International Labour Foundation for Sustainable Development. Both of these organizations are linked with UN-based initiatives in which the U.S. labour movement has rarely played an active role. Still, Canadian labour has not yet undertaken serious consideration of transnational institution-building and policy-making along the lines of the ETUC example. Thus, for example, the agreement that regulates the NAFTA economic region remains as silent on social bargaining on the environment, including the potential role of organized labour, as it does on assurances of workers’ rights generally.

### **Labour Policy and Practice on the Environment**

Above, I have described some of the possibilities and limits of labour relations regimes for progressive action on environmental issues. This framework of labour relations forms an important component of the context in which union initiatives, strategy, training, and adult learning practice take place. In this section, I take a closer look at the policies and activities of organized labour.

Since the early 1980s, unions have played an increasingly active role in responding to environmental problems internationally. This role has been amply described in policy literature, including the ETUC’s recent *Climate Change: Avenues for Trade Union Action* (2004). Moreover, having completed its first global assembly on labour and the environment in 2006, the International Labour Foundation for Sustainable Development has continued to outline the practices and goals of organized labour across the globe.

Likewise, the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) resolution document on green jobs creation (2003) offers valuable information regarding the past and future direction of unions acting against environmental degradation. In such documents it becomes clear that Canadian labour views environmental crisis as an opportunity to contribute to sustainability as well as an opportunity to create greater social and economic justice:

Sustainable workplaces are the indispensable key to a sustainable economy and community: it is impossible to imagine global sustainability and sustainable consumption without sustainable production. New jobs in new workplaces pose a dilemma for unions, a dilemma that was addressed at length in the CLC *Just Transition Policy*. The simple creation of new jobs is no guarantee that they will be secure, well paid and subject to employment equity. (Canadian Labour Congress [CLC], 2003, p. 9)

In fact, the CLC's *Green Job Creation Project* (2003) has built its environmental vision around an orientation to the interrelations between sustainable environments, sustainable economies, and social justice. It outlines an understanding of just, environmentally sustainable economy in terms of several core principles:

- (1) Value and protect other species, biodiversity, and ecosystem vitality.
- (2) Focus on the quality of life, not the standard of living.
- (3) Live within the limits of natural systems.
- (4) Ensure just use and distribution of resources.
- (5) Create the conditions for broad participation by a knowledgeable workforce and the public.

With a focus on the workplace, Canadian labour argues that attention must be paid to specific products and services, energy/material use, waste and byproducts, the way that work is done, its quality in terms of human need, and adequate recognition of existing green employment. The CLC recognizes that these principles can be expressed in terms of two basic variations: (1) existing work process producing alternative products, and (2) new work processes in alternative industries. It states clearly that, for effective action, neither can be ignored, and that workers' input, knowledge, and creativity are pivotal.

Crucial to understanding the CLC position on the environment is its *CLC Policy on Just Transition for Workers During Environmental Change* (1999): a policy developed in relation to the international labour movement (i.e., ICFTU). The main provisions in the policy focus on a commitment to displaced workers in terms of income protection and community support within the process of transition toward a sustainable economy. However, the policy also outlines the need for greater research and development for environmentally sustainable work processes and products. Beyond statements of principle, policy, and national/international organizational commitment, however, the Canadian labour movement has consistently sought to intervene in environmental matters at the level of local bargaining and sector-based initiatives as well.

Drawing on information from CLC policy documents (1999, 2003) and the specific affiliated unions themselves, here I profile some of the many progressive initiatives undertaken by labour across different workplaces, sectors, and regions. Each example

represents a seemingly mundane work process or product issue. They are initiatives rooted in the application of workers' knowledge and creative capacities, and when translated across work practices as a whole can have valuable, concrete environmental impacts.

In the public sector, several examples stand out. The Canadian Union of Postal Workers has for some time fought against private vehicle use for postal delivery, which has been shown to increase overall CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. The union combines this with proposals to increase the use of environmentally friendly delivery vehicles and delivery on foot. The National Union of Public and General Employees continues to campaign and bargain to establish universal recycling, workplace energy audits, stringent forest practices, and beverage container refunds. The Canadian Union of Public Employees' water, sewage, and anti-incinerator campaigns, as well as bargaining, have directly challenged privatization of services, which has been shown to be wasteful and dangerous to public health. And the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association has formally undertaken efforts to lobby for required environmental education in schools as well as the innovative "walking school buses" initiative to build public fitness and reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

In the private sector, United Steelworkers was the first Canadian union to bargain for work-based union environmental representatives, and it continues to put pollution emission reduction on the bargaining table. Likewise, on top of its innovative bargaining for toxic substance reduction, Canadian Auto Workers has worked, both in contract negotiations and through public policy campaigns, for alternative vehicle product development (both fuel cell and hybrid models), and has proposed a policy for total reuse and recycling of autos and parts. The International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers has for over a decade now consistently bargained for the capturing, reuse, and conversion of aircraft deicing fluids and for alternative energy vehicles. Construction unions have long advocated retrofitting and building material reuse/recycling, against the growing trend led by the various incarnations of the development lobby for less regulation. Finally, the favourite villain in Canadian media accounts of union-environmentalist conflict, the International Woodworkers union in Canada, has consistently bargained for hardwood waste utilization and wood-waste cogeneration stations while lobbying companies to engage in sustainable harvesting methods, forest rehabilitation, fibre exchange at mills to optimize the use of transport, and better end-use of products under strict forest practice codes. The work of these, and other unions, formed the initial impetus for the CLC *Green Job Creation Project*. The vast majority of these proposals, it should be noted, are routinely opposed by management negotiators in both private and public sectors. Rooted in labour relations regulations that find clauses on management rights governing product and process changes almost exclusively, workers quickly find their ideas for environmental improvements pitted against traditional wage, benefits, and job security improvements.

Overall, these examples of union environmental action are not the sexy material that garners media attention, but clearly they should not be overlooked as important contributions to environmental change at the workplace level. Each initiative provides a foundation for future strategic action. In both the cases of public- and private-sector union action on the environment, a comprehensive listing of progressive initiatives could go on for some time. What is obvious is the enormous job creation capacity inherent in virtually

all of these approaches: an expression of the confluence of environmental improvements, economic redistribution, and social justice.

### **Adult Learning, Conflict, and Capacity Building Across Labour and Environmental Movements**

Bargained for at the local level and understood on an international comparative basis, the initiatives listed above represent unique labour responses to environmental crisis. However, beyond initiatives internal to organized labour and the bargaining process, the labour movement has often found itself in a more contradictory role when it intersects with environmental movement activism. Importantly, these intersections of different social movements represent a key component of a strategy for intervention from below, as mentioned earlier.

Research literature on environmental issues has documented both coalitions and contentiousness among organized labour and environmental movements in Canada, the United States, Europe, and Australia (Adkins, 1998; Bantjes, 1997; Clover, 2006; Goodstein, 1999; Norton, 2003, 2004; Obach, 2002; Roelof, 1999; Rose, 2003; Turner, 2006). Indeed, if one were to follow the lead of corporate media in Canada, we see a developed narrative that depicts unions as a regressive force in the environmental debate. From this perspective, if there is a poster child of the ugly face of labour on environmental issues, it would appear to be found in the actions of forestry workers. Scull (2001) captures the basic logic of this narrative well:

When environmentalists . . . try to protect old-growth forest, they are often opposed by both the logging corporations and by the unions representing the loggers. The union is concerned for its members but does not seem to share the concern of many environmentalists for its members' children or for the fishers, tourism operators, First Nations, and others whose livelihoods also depend on the health of the forest. (p. 15)

However, on closer inspection we find that, in the case of North American forestry workers/unions, there has been a long struggle—internally and externally, successfully and unsuccessfully—to establish a progressive stance at the confluence of environmental, political, and economic questions since the early post-war period (see Prudham, 2007).

One way of understanding organized labour's future with regard to progressive responses to environmental crisis—particularly if we admit the need for progressive strategies of change from below—is to move beyond the established narrative to explore the separate and parallel tracks of the labour and environmental movements in terms of the role of adult education and adult learning. In these terms, we benefit from recognition of both organized and informal learning activity.

Beginning with a profile of course offerings and organized learning for the Canadian labour movement, as Spencer (2006) points out:

The question [is]: What has labour done to promote environmentalism in its regular educational work? The answer to this question can be provided in part by looking at the work of the CLC. The CLC has been committed

to environmentalism and, more specifically, to sustainable development for some time . . . Although developing education courses has not been the major focus of the CLC's campaign on the environment, to ensure its perspectives were understood by its own affiliates and their members, the CLC began developing courses for union members . . . CLC courses, particularly the week-long Union Environmental Action course, are examples of the best traditions of workers' education in that the socio-political-economic context is provided as a basis for consideration of policy decision and union actions. (pp. 68–69)

Moreover, in terms of the role of education and communication in labour movement action internationally, Heins (2004) begins his review of trade union activities on the environment by noting that:

Labour unions have a unique infrastructure to facilitate changes in the working environment and are involved in initiatives and policy-making processes on local, regional, national and international levels . . . labour unions possess a large number of organised workers, expertise and communication channels and thus a great potential for drawing further participants and expertise into the process towards more sustainable consumption and production patterns. (p. 3)

Heins (2004) goes on to summarize activities via an international collection of case studies where organized educational programming consistently figures prominently. Likewise, Gereluk and Royer (2001) draw on research carried out through the combined efforts of the International Labour Organization (ILO), the ICFTU, and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Trade Union Advisory Committee (TUAC) (organizations that, together, represent over 155 million workers worldwide). Gereluk and Royer's review summarizes union efforts in relation to sustainable workplace and environmental development and goes on to say that the principle informing this type of union-based educational framework is union-led activity in the workplace as the training ground for broader democratic leadership:

Awareness of the issues concerning energy consumption and emissions is a prerequisite to action, and the facts concerning current patterns are startling in themselves. With their well-developed capacity for education and communication, unions can work with other social partners to raise awareness: they are the foremost providers of adult education in many countries . . . Workplace education can change attitudes and habits, especially when accompanied by participatory approaches to management involving workers and their unions. The fact that workplaces play such a dominant role in the lives of workers means that participatory programmes which improve workplace performance will have a predictable impact on personal consumption patterns of workers and the community. (p. 15)

Indeed, this labour educational world view is possibly best represented internationally by the ILO's Workers' Education and Environment program (ILO, 1996)

launched in 1991. In this program, participants from around the world engaged in educational programming to respond to the needs of their fellow workers and communities specifically through workplace action.

While in Canada and internationally, unions have carried out organized educational programming on environmental issues, it is equally clear that informal learning is of equal importance. Definitions of informal learning suggest that it is a given element of all human activity: people engage in activity through which their skills and knowledge are confirmed, redirected, and/or developed (see Fenwick, Nesbit, & Spencer, 2006; Livingstone & Sawchuk, 2004; Sawchuk, 2003). Less easily documented than organized course delivery, informal learning is, nevertheless, a crucial component of labour’s response to environmental issues. Longtime union educator D’Arcy Martin (1995), for example, confirms that the crucial lessons union members learn come from the streets and picket lines much more than courses. Thus, informal learning in support of awareness-raising and specific initiatives or campaigns is both intensive and important.

Applying this concept to the points where labour and environmental movements intersect, we can more easily recognize the powerful opportunities for learning and inter-movement capacity-building; in this sense, analysis of social movement-based informal learning represents an important missing piece of the puzzle for understanding the potential for labour to bring about positive environmental change. However, as Scull (2001) points out, such meetings are fraught with conflict where “the animosity of workers towards environmentalists amounts to shooting the messenger . . . [and] the animosity of environmentalists towards workers confuses necessity and choice” (p. 16). This is a point expanded on by Norton (2003, 2004), who rejects inherent class contradictions as determinant of the success or failure of efforts at inter-movement collaboration. Clover (2006) is among the few who have captured a positive example of adult education intervention in her research on how such processes unfold and the gains to be won through moments of informal action learning such as the following:

In 2000 in Toronto a group of environmentalists, artists and sanitation workers came together to creatively explore the issue of waste. The mediums or canvases chosen were four garbage trucks. Workshops held over the weekend provided the opportunity for participants to overcome preconceived stereotypes (that environmentalists care only about trees and workers only about jobs) by telling stories and to create a series of images that reflected their concerns about the environment. In particular, the group learned that the people who have the most sophisticated and deepest understanding of waste are not the environmentalists, but rather those who drive the trucks each day to and from landfill sites and recycling plants. (p. 257)

However, adult education intervention and informal learning research of the type Clover describes remain rare, despite the fact that Clover, Hall and Viezzer’s *Awakening Sleepy Knowledge: Transformative Learning in Action* (1994) set the stage for such investigations over a decade and a half ago (see Hall & Turey, 2006). In fact, organized educational courses are virtually never associated with the instances in which activists from these different groups find themselves thrown together in situ under intense and often

conflictual conditions. In this context, analyses of informal learning become the primary resource for understanding the potential within human developmental dynamics. It is in these sites of informal action learning that the new challenges and new possibilities for collaboration are to be found: instances in which—with a broader understanding of labour relations, union policy, and practice as outlined above—new forms of adult learning intervention may be developed.

Building on the research that does exist, however, we can see that one of the few conceptually informed, critical analyses of informal learning in the context of the labour and environmental movement clashes is offered by Foley (1998). In Chapter 3 of *Learning in Social Action* (see also Foley, 1991), he outlines the activities of a rainforest protection group in its campaign in Eastern Australia. With its roots in 1970s lobbying to limit forestry in the area, the group eventually launched the Terania Creek Campaign. In broad educational terms, the entire curriculum one would expect of such activity was present: knowledge of the issues, knowledge of governmental and industry processes, state and corporate power, organizing tactics, and communications strategy. These were the learning contents that Foley establishes through interview and ethnographic research. This content, as can be seen, focused on both the subject matter at hand and, crucially, the process of inter-movement engagement and change. However, by the time the Terania Creek Campaign protest camp was established, Foley shows how participants naturally confronted deeply political questions about the nature of their own as well as their (various) opponents' power.

What is of particular value to this discussion is how the protest polarized the region, and here we might focus in particular on forestry workers and their union. We see in Foley's (1998) account that the conflict is egged on by local media bent on capitalizing upon conflict across the labour and environmental groups. What comes clearly into view are the bases for the conflict:

In the years following World War Two, mechanization, mergers and national economic crisis and restructuring caused a long-term decline in employment in the timber industry . . . In the 1970s this process accelerated, with large sawmills buying out smaller ones, "in order to obtain their crown log quotas. They then closed down the mills and sold off the equipment." In this situation, the conservationists' demand that logging be halted at Terania Creek was threatening to both local workers and business people. The Terania campaigners tried, but failed, to convince timber workers that logging native forests was futile . . . As one of the conservationists later realized, neither spiritual nor economic arguments against logging "make sense to someone who's talking about his kids and his job. And you especially can't tell him that his job is going to be gone in ten years anyway... he's worried about right now." (Foley, 1998, p. 36)

These conditions are easily recognizable in the Canadian context. But following this, Foley (1998) goes on to analyze the emergent learning processes. From these seemingly two intransigent (worker vs. environmentalist) positions arose deep knowledge of the economic and class-cultural dimensions of the conflict. What is equally interesting

is how environmental activists came to identify the core problems as corporate- and state-based and not primarily rooted in conflict between workers and themselves.

Among the many things that can be taken from Foley's (1998) research is that for the continued development of environmental/union collaboration, a broad set of educational initiatives—including organized intervention and informal dynamics—must be considered. Both the labour and environmental movements must continue to learn from these processes if there is any real hope of successful *détente*. Indeed, the last decade has seen attempts by unions to develop environmental awareness among their memberships. This required organized educational support as well as the establishment of broader union cultural acceptance. Yet it remains that the process of in situ meetings of workers and environmentalist is an additional crucial building block to future collaboration, as well as an important area for informed, adult education intervention.

### **Conclusions**

When thinking about many of the environmental problems we face today, as Scull (2001) points out, it is often workers and workers' families who are the first victims. They are victims in terms of the pollution and immediate byproducts of production. Workers are put in double jeopardy, however, when they see waste, pollution, and managerial refusal to engage in new product and process development contributing to broader environmental collapse. These same contradictions were seen in our review of the Terania Creek Campaign in Australia, where environmentalists learned that political economic structures, more than any particular shortsightedness of workers, were a root cause of the difficulties. One thing we can be sure of is that the difficulties unions face in greening the point of production, or the ones that environmental campaigns face in challenging industry, are not matters of individual or corporate caprice, but reflections of our broader social and economic arrangements including labour relations legacies.

The labour movement, both internationally and in Canada, has clearly begun to establish a foundation of opposing environmental degradation and supporting social justice despite unevenness in its record. These advances are vastly underreported. However, in this article I have attempted to synthesize accounts of the barriers represented by labour relations regimes with the specific efforts that unions have engaged in through bargaining and various other initiatives aimed at altering both work products and processes. I conclude that the mix of centralized and decentralized structures unique to the Canadian labour relations context have provided enough gaps to allow unions to begin to engage in progressive initiatives and educational programming.

However, in exploring the opportunities for the working out of a concrete program for just and environmentally sustainable social, political, and economic change, we also see that attention to policy initiatives, overcoming the barriers of labour relations regimes, and organized education are necessary but not sufficient. I argued that this comes most clearly into view when we explore the ways that the environmental and labour movements have found themselves in conflict. This conflict has been reported in popular media, often reifying differences and not infrequently vilifying organized labour. However, by exploring some discrete examples from adult education research and by viewing such inter-movement

conflict through the lens of informal learning, we are provided with an important means of assessing the possibility for positive change.

Central to achieving environmental change are three recommendations. There is a need for intensified environmental adult education among the public at large. There is a need for intensified adult education specific to the preoccupations of both the labour and environmental movements in particular. Finally, there is a need for deeper understanding of the informal learning dynamics and forms of intervention that can lead to collaboration in the spaces where activists meet.

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