

## EDUCATING UNION CANADA<sup>1</sup>

**Bruce Spencer**

Athabasca University

### Abstract

*This article provides an overview of labour education in Canada today. It discusses the range and nature of the provision, gives examples of programs and reviews the effectiveness of this major contribution to nonformal education for working people.*

### Résumé

*Dans cet article nous proposons de présenter une vue d'ensemble de l'éducation scolaire ouvrière au Canada. Nous discuterons de l'étendue et de la nature de l'éducation nous fournirons des exemples de programmes, nous réexaminerons l'efficacité de l'éducation scolaire et nous montrerons enfin quel rôle celle-ci joue dans la formation non-scolaire des ouvriers.*

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...the largest public contribution to systematic adult education during the early seventies has been the financial support of the Federal Government for labour education.... The expenditures of these organizations (labour unions) on education has also increased, making it possible for thousands of Canadian workers to acquire skills of management, decision making, and knowledge about society that otherwise would have been very hard to achieve.

It is of special importance to note that the money was given not to educational agencies, but to the labour organizations themselves. Most of these latter established their own educational programs, seeking only occasional assistance from the formal educational agencies. (Thomas, 1993, p. 15)

### Introduction

Alan Thomas' reference to labour education in the popular text *The Craft of Teaching Adults*, alerts Canadian adult educators to an important sphere of adult education little known to them. This may not be so surprising because, as he makes clear, labour unions undertake most labour education themselves without the assistance of professional adult educators. Although the funding by the Federal Government has reduced significantly recently, and many companies claim to be engaged in workplace learning in the 1990s, union controlled labour education remains a major provider of nonformal adult education for working people.

<sup>1</sup> This research comprises part of a three-year comparative study of worker education funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. A shorter version of this article was presented at the Society of Socialist Studies Conference, Calgary, June 12, 1994. This revised article has drawn on the comments of conference participants and union officials who responded to the earlier version.

This article is essentially descriptive. It:

1. Describes the scope of Canadian labour education.
2. Gives examples of union provision.
3. Discusses the involvement of educational institutions.
4. Explores labour education's contribution to union environmental policy.
5. Reviews the effectiveness of labour education in Canada.

A main purpose of labour education<sup>2</sup> is to prepare and train union lay members to play an active role in the union. Another purpose is to educate activists and members about union policy, about changes in the union environment such as new management techniques or changes in labour law. Labour education is also used to develop union consciousness, to build common goals and to share organizing and campaign experience. Unions have a small full time staff and therefore rely on what is essentially voluntary activity of their members to be effective at work; the labour education program is a major contributor to building an effective volunteer force.

Most labour union members learn about the union while on the job (what is often referred to as informal or incidental learning). They probably learn more and are most active during disputes, but they also learn from union publications and communications; from attending meetings, conferences, and conventions; and from the union's educational programs. Although labour education only caters to a small number of members in any one year it is "social," as opposed to personal, education. It is designed to benefit a larger number of members because the course participants bring the education to other union members. Labour education has a social purpose—to promote and develop the union presence and purpose, so as to advance the union collectively.

### **The Extent of Labour Education**

It is difficult to present an accurate picture of the extent of labour education in Canada for several reasons:

1. There is no consistent statistical data on labour education courses offered.
2. There is no clear definition of what constitutes labour education.

While labour centrals such as the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) and Canadian Federation of Labour (CFL) do collect information on the numbers of courses provided by their affiliates or by themselves and the number of union members attending, they do not have the resources to compile statistical reports. There is also no consistency in the reporting of educational provision by affiliates, provincial labour bodies or independent unions. Courses might be provided by a union local or a labour council or they may be offered collaboratively with local colleges. They may draw on funds provided provincially or nationally. When courses are funded by the Government of Canada Human Resources Development (formerly Labour

<sup>2</sup> The term "union education" can be used interchangeably with "labour education" in this article. Union education is sometimes reserved for courses run directly by unions as opposed to labour education courses run for unions by other providers.

Canada), records are kept and receipts forwarded, but the receipts only provide statistical data for those individuals claiming assistance and may not include a majority of those unionists in the course.

The CLC, (60% of Canadian union members belong to unions affiliated with the CLC), accounts for the largest slice of the Government of Canada Human Resources Development funds. It reports that 1,496 students received assistance for 24 provincial schools in 1992-1993 (this data is for both week-long "schools," which include several courses, and separate week-long courses or workshops), but estimates that between 10 to 15,000 union members attend courses in which the CLC is involved (personal communication, CLC staff, April 1994). If figures are added from the educational provision of individual unions and labour councils these figures can easily be tripled, but there are dangers of double counting. For example, a course provided essentially for an individual union might be offered at a provincial federation of labour school which is partly funded by the CLC. However, the educational provision made by individual unions, union locals, and labour councils is probably two to three times that made by the CLC and other union centrals.

There is also the question of what counts as labour education? Does an in-company course offered to union safety committee members, taught by union and management tutors count as "labour education?" If so does it still count if supervisors and management committee members are present? Does a two hour union induction program for new starters count as labour education?

Given these kinds of problems, it is probably of little value to attempt to pin down an accurate statistic of labour education in Canada. At best we can "guesstimate" based on the returns to the Government of Canada Human Resources Development, the records of individual unions and assumptions as to what constitutes "labour education." Some of the statistics include the following:

1. The Government of Canada Human Resources Development provided educational funds for the independent, nonaffiliated unions in 1992-1993 on the basis of a total of 454,000 members. The independents claimed 15,501 members participated in those funded courses, giving a participation rate of 3.4%.
2. To take an example of one union, the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union (UFCW) calculates 3,227 of its Canadian members participated in courses over an eleven-month period and another 668 members attended industrial conferences (giving a participation rate between 2% and 3.5% over one year on a membership of approximately 170,000).
3. As another example, the Ontario Nurses' Association (ONA) with 50,000 members educates 2,000 (4%) members per year.

Just as we can estimate the extent of labour education, we can also provide a list of items to be incorporated within a working definition of labour education. Mainstream labour education includes the following:

1. Courses lasting at least one half-day (thereby omitting short talks and inductions for new members).
2. All weekend, evening, and daytime classes up to and including the eight-week residential Labour College of Canada course.
3. Courses essentially controlled by the unions and targeted at their members, union representatives and officials.
4. Courses designed to enhance union effectiveness or develop union consciousness.
5. All courses for union members except specific "job" (vocational) training (but including courses on negotiating vocational training).

Using this definition and the statistical information available, we can guess that some 120,000 union members per year (3% of the total) underwent some form of labour education in Canada in the early 1990s. (The participation rate may have been double a decade earlier, when the economy was more buoyant and release time was easier to negotiate.)<sup>3</sup>

Such a "guesstimate" would place Canadian labour education at a similar level of provision to that in the UK and Australia (although there is probably less study time per student in Canada than in the UK), but much lower than the level of provision in Scandinavia (10% or more) where there are stronger traditions of union and workers' education and different relations between unions and the state.

### **An Overview of Labour Education**

Most of the labour education courses provided by unions in Canada are *tool* courses (for example, shop steward training, grievance handling, health and safety). The next largest category are *issues* courses (for example, sexual harassment or racism) which often seek to link workplace and societal issues. A third group of courses can be labelled *labour studies* which seek to examine the union context (for example, labour history, economics, and politics).

*Tool* courses directly prepare members for active roles in the union and as representatives of the union, they are targeted at existing or potential union activists. They are provided directly by the unions, the provincial labour federations or the union centrals (such as the CLC), and only rarely placed in educational establishments, unlike the situation in the US and the UK where colleges and university extension programmes have traditionally provided some tool courses.

Many unions, such as the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) and the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), layer their courses; that is, they have introductory and advanced programs. Advanced courses are available to those who have completed introductory courses. Some of these tool courses lead on to *issue* courses (sometimes referred to as "awareness" courses) which are specifically

<sup>3</sup> The origins of the CLC's Labour College is discussed in Swerdlow (1990), Chapter 10.

targeted at raising awareness of issues and are available after members have completed basic *tool* courses.

The union movement also provides more extensive and demanding educational opportunities such as the CLC's eight-week residential Labour College which teaches five courses—labour history, economics, sociology, labour law, and politics—at a first year university level. While the Labour College uses some university educators, it is directly accountable to the CLC and, although placed in the University of Ottawa, is a separate entity accountable to the CLC. This differs from the roughly equivalent Harvard's Trade Union Program, or adult residential colleges in the UK, such as Ruskin and Northern College. Although the Labour College has 60 places only each year, it builds union contacts among labour activists from different unions and has been in existence for 30 years (personal communication, Danny Mallet, CLC National Coordinator of Program Development, July 1994).

These more extensive courses are *labour studies* courses, designed to broaden participants' awareness of the context of labour unionism. Whilst the CLC Labour College of Canada is the flagship program, this category could also include:

1. Short courses, for example in labour history or economics, offered by labour councils over a number of evenings, or by provincial labour bodies (often in conjunction with the CLC) in a week-long school.
2. The Paid Educational Leave (PEL) courses offered by the Canadian Autoworkers (CAW) and Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) for their members.

While many universities in Canada offer labour studies concentrations to undergraduates as part of their degree offerings, few have dedicated programs of study designed for, and made available to, trade unionists. Those that do in Western Canada include:

1. Simon Fraser University Labour Program (Bernard, 1991).
2. Manitoba's University-Labour Three Year Certificate Programme (Saturday mornings).
3. University of Saskatchewan's Labour Studies Programme (3 hour evening classes for three years).

In the Maritimes the principal program is the Atlantic Region Labour Education Centre (ARLEC) run through St. Francis Xavier Extension, Nova Scotia. Other universities and colleges claim their classes are open to trade unionists but in some cases it is unclear if these are dedicated courses intended to provide a coherent program of study and if the programs are cosponsored by local trade unions. Certificates are granted in some cases but these courses are usually noncredit even if a certificate is awarded.

The intention of the dedicated courses is to supplement trade union tool courses with a broader educational program, and to provide a research basis for union activity. Although unions are represented on the "boards of studies" of these programs they are rarely union controlled in contrast to union run courses. (To be consistent with our earlier definition these should probably not be considered

"labour education" but rather labour studies programs made available to labour unionists. However, in practice, many local unions are funding members to attend and do consider them labour or union education).

Beyond the university programs mentioned, there are also courses and programs offered by other educational bodies. Toronto's Metro Labour Education Centre provides tool and issue courses, and together with George Brown College offers a Labour Studies Certificate program. There is some similar work going on in individual community colleges. An interesting example of union-college cooperation, partly based on Toronto's experience, is provided by Ottawa and District Labour Council and Algonquin College which have established a Labour Studies Institute. The labour council, working with individual unions, offers a range of primarily tool training and issue courses, typically of 30 hours duration. Members attending the courses have their hours logged and can register for a labour studies certificate issued by the college when they have undertaken 240 hours of study including some core courses in labour studies (chosen from courses such as labour history, economics, politics and international affairs). The certificate does not give automatic credit transfer but will be taken into account when members apply for other courses at the college.

In other colleges, such as Capilano (Vancouver), courses are provided to meet the needs of particular unions and again cover the range of tool, issue and labour studies topics over a one- to five-day period. Most courses offered by Capilano are focused on two-day tool training for workplace representatives from particular unions, but they also offer public and broader courses and credit transfer. In spite of these examples, college and university provision of labour education is not widespread, the kind of service that Capilano offers small unions in the Vancouver area is organized in Manitoba by a committee of the Manitoba Federation of Labour. As small unions merge into larger organizations there could be even less demand for institutional provision as their representative training moves "in-house." Canadian college and university provision of labour education is much less than that offered in either the UK or the US.

Arguably, a review of labour education should include some reference to union-run literacy courses, many of which are tutored by fellow unionists and act as a bridge linking immigrant or illiterate workers to union concerns and publications. The Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) sponsors an active "Literacy in the Workplace" program. Similarly, unions are responsible for a number of worker training programs which allow the unions to educate workers about union concerns alongside the vocational training. The building trades are particularly active in this area, but other examples are to be found in the sectoral training programs—the CAW involvement in autoworkers' training is a case in point—or within particular collective agreements such as those of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union. Unions, including noncraft unions, are becoming much more proactive in responding to company restructuring and deskilling and are arguing for reskilling, skills recognition, and skills profiling, as well challenging employers to live up to their rhetoric on pay for knowledge. However, these questions of worker training

or worker education go beyond the scope of this article which is concerned with labour education or workers' education—education to support the labour movement not education for work. A case can be made for including some worker health and safety training in which unions are involved (this should not be confused with union safety representative training) within a review of labour education. These courses allow unions to argue for a union view (safe workplace) as opposed to a management view (safe worker) of health and safety. In Quebec and Ontario in particular, union-run worker health and safety training has been used as part of union organizing drives. In all of these cases it can be argued that sectoral or company money as well as union funds is being used to support "labour education."

Unions have also had some limited involvement in television productions such as *Work Week*, or in *BC Working TV*, which clearly have educational objectives. Union representatives participate in television and radio programmes in an attempt to present union perspectives, influence public opinion and to educate their members. Some unions are also actively involved in encouraging schools to broaden their curriculum to include labour issues and are providing speakers for school visits.

In summary, most labour education in Canada is *tool training* and *issues* courses targeted at union activists. In addition, unions and union centrals provide *labour studies* programs, often reserved for those activists who have been through the tool and issues courses, but sometimes targeted at members generally. A few educational institutions work with unions to provide labour education (more often labour studies) programs for labour unionists across Canada. Unions are also involved in workplace literacy and worker training programs and in televisual broadcasting, all of which are targeted at members and do include some elements of labour education. What follows is a discussion of different union's educational provision: first, an example of a union's education program which ties together these different strands of labour education; second, a discussion of professional union education; third, membership education; and fourth, a review of a union course on international issues.

#### An Example of Union Provision: CUPE's Six Level Program<sup>4</sup>

Individual unions offer a range of courses for activists. Although the particular offerings will vary, the kinds of courses offered by CUPE are broadly typical of those of other Canadian unions. CUPE's six level education program is graded and leads to a certificate of completion for members who have undertaken the six levels of courses—including the CLC Labour College.

Courses in levels one to four are usually offered at weekends or week-long seminars and are instructed by "peer instructors" or union staff. Broadly speaking, the levels are:

1. New Members and Officers

<sup>4</sup> Thanks to Joe Bouchard, National Representative, CUPE, Niagara Area Office for the following information.

2. Steward Training
3. Collective Bargaining
4. Specialized Courses
5. Labour College Correspondence Courses
6. Labour College Residential Program.

**Level One—New Members and Officers.** Level one includes a course called *Our Union* which is designed to provide newer members and new local unions with knowledge about CUPE and how it functions. It also shows participants how to set up and run an effective union organization, including union committees. For example, it explains the role of union officers and how to conduct meetings. Another course offered at this level is the *Financial Officer Training* which is specially designed for secretary treasurers and trustees.

**Level Two—Steward Training.** Level two, Steward Training, is divided into two courses. The first is *Effective Stewarding*, a basic course which is primarily instructed by trained rank and file occasional instructors. The second course is *Advanced Steward Training* which is usually presented by union staff. This second course offers more analysis of contract language and arbitration cases than the "grievance handling" component of the first course.

**Level Three—Collective Bargaining.** Level three, Collective Bargaining, offers three courses to be taken consecutively. The *Introduction to Bargaining* course attempts to demonstrate how many of the negotiating skills used in daily life relate to the collective bargaining process. It also focuses on how to develop an overall bargaining strategy to achieve specific goals. The course includes:

1. How to set and pursue bargaining goals.
2. Dealing with the employer.
3. The importance of good communication skills.
4. Leadership in bargaining.
5. Developing effective tactics.
6. Building support for bargaining goals, both within the local and the community.
7. The right to strike.
8. Presenting a settlement to the membership.

The second collective bargaining course provides an overview of the collective bargaining system as it exists in Canada today. It outlines the roles played by the three main participants—employers, unions, and governments—and analyses the strengths and weaknesses of the system. It introduces the CUPE standard agreement and deals in detail with a number of contemporary issues.

The third course deals with formulating and substantiating collective bargaining demands and helps participants use research and statistical materials. When the course is given in a seminar setting, a mock bargaining session is a component.

**Level Four—Specialized Courses.** Level four, Specialized Courses, is divided into three categories:



1. Advanced discussions of material already covered such as advanced parliamentary procedure, arbitration, public speaking and face-to-face communications.
2. Courses designed to broaden the understanding of the role of trade union activity in the context of Canadian and world citizenship such as *Political Action, Understanding Economics, Labour Law*.
3. All the special issue courses such as *Health and Safety Training, Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS), Pay Equity, Employment Equity, Contracting Out, Aids in the Workplace, Union Counselling*.

**Levels Five and Six-Labour College.** The first two categories of Level Four serve the additional purpose of preparing members for the Level Five Labour College Correspondence course and Level Six Labour College of Canada eight week residential program.

Most of these courses, in the first four levels, are available at weekend seminars sponsored by the CUPE District Councils. Specific courses are arranged for union locals (or groups of them). In Ontario, the Ontario division sponsors up to three large weekend seminars with ten to twelve courses and upwards of 350 participants. CUPE National also holds three, week-long schools in Ontario. Some of these courses are available on a correspondence basis.

CUPE is also the sponsor of SoliNet, an electronic mail and computer conferencing system, which is made available to all sections of the labour and social movements. It links Canadians "from sea to sea to sea," and includes some subscribers from the USA, providing a vital exchange of information and ideas at a relatively low cost. It also uses the network to support its educational programs and is offering, in collaboration with Athabasca University, distance learning, university accredited, labour studies courses on SoliNet.

Many aspects of the CUPE six level program are replicated by other unions at local, provincial, and national levels. The mix of tool training and issue courses is common to typical union education programs in Canada; however, in some unions the level four courses on economics or labour law are left to the CLC sponsored provincial federation of labour schools. Course offerings also reflect the problems faced by a particular industrial sector. For example, the UFCW includes courses on repetitive strain injury as well as more common health and safety topics. It also has programs on layoffs and closures, and an extensive union sponsored literacy program.

### **Professional Unions: Nurses and Teachers**

A growth area for organized labour in Canada since the 1960s has been public sector professionals, some of whom are organized within existing unions but more typically are organized independently into provincial unions, such as the ONA or the British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF). Most of these provincial unions are not affiliated to any central labour body.

Many of the programs run by these organizations are similar to those of other unions but some reflect professional concerns. For example, the ONA has a program on professional responsibility which encompasses the dual accountability of nurses as employees and as professionals. The BCTF includes courses on a *Code of Ethics* and *Violence in Schools* within their programs.

Other courses offered reflect the particular situation facing members, such as courses on *Assertiveness Training* for nurses and on *Political Lobbying* for both groups. The BCTF in preparation for a shift from localized to centralized bargaining extended the availability of their education programs to include more local representatives who may be involved in contract administration.

These unions, or professional associations, face a number of problems, and while they are not unique to professional unionism, they are common to them. These include:

1. The cost involved in gathering together representatives from scattered workplaces.
2. Getting time off and meeting the costs of wages lost or replacement labour (for example, a supply teacher).
3. The problem of developing a "union consciousness" among members.

The BCTF would argue that what they are trying to do is develop a critical consciousness among their members, particularly in offering general courses on educational themes. It is clear that such programs also have an objective of building union identity by encouraging members to identify issues on which the union should campaign. Some unions have directly tackled the problem of developing union and class consciousness through a "membership education" program.

### **Membership Education: The CAW PEL Program**

A number of unions are running membership education courses targeted at the broader membership and not just union activists. The most distinctive and intensive is that offered by the CAW. This program, which is now emulated by the CUPW, is not focused narrowly on preparing representatives for collective bargaining but on promoting an understanding of the union's social and political goals (Spencer, 1992; Saul, 1994).

The CAW and its predecessor the Canadian section of the United Auto Workers (UAW), have been running extensive educational programs for their members and activists throughout the postwar period. Since the split from the UAW, the CAW has refurbished its Family Education Centre at Port Elgin, Ontario (on the shores of Lake Huron) and overhauled its educational programs. Central to this refurbishment is the union's PEL program. The program is funded by a two to three cent per member, per hour benefit negotiated in contracts with employers. The money goes into a trust fund and is used to pay for lost wages, travel, accommodation and the educational costs of the program. The bargaining unit (usually a particular local) can send as many members as its contributions allow. The program consists of four, week-long residential courses, usually separated by

two to three weeks back at work. The program is previewed by applicants at a weekend residential school, to which applicants' partners are invited and commitments made to take the full course. A PEL course would typically consist of 130 members subdivided into six groups. The union also offers the program in French. By 1994 more than 4,000 members had completed the CAW PEL program.

Each week (level) of the course has a separate theme:

- Level 1 the present as history,
- Level 2 sociology,
- Level 3 political economy,
- Level 4 social and political change.

Some study skills (e.g., basic math and reading) and union representative skills (e.g., reporting and effective speaking) are built into the course. There are also committees established at the outset from among the course members, which mirror the kind of committees operating throughout the union—substance abuse, international affairs, women, human rights, culture, and recreation. These committees organize events during the course and make recommendations to the course coordinator. The course concludes with a convention (mock-conference) focusing on the wide range of issues addressed during the course and reported on by the committees.

Videos are used extensively and shared by members, but they have not replaced written materials which are sometimes read aloud, using a system of voluntary readers in each group. (Reading aloud was a technique used in early North American unions. For example, Samuel Gompers, American Federation of Labor President (1886-1894 and 1896-1924), began his union work as a reader to cigar makers.) Each week there are a number of plenary sessions with union and guest speakers and with an opportunity for questions and discussion from the floor. These can vary depending on the issues of the day and on student requests. For example, topics might include free trade, refugees, Palestine, community politics, and coalition building. These sessions complement the work going on in the classroom and in student committees.

Local Union Discussion Leaders (LUDLs) lead the groups. These volunteers are union activists whose release can be negotiated for a particular week (their wages are paid for out of the PEL trust fund) and have received additional discussion leader training. In addition to training in teaching methods, these lay tutors meet annually to discuss changes in course content and updating of materials.

There is plenty of opportunity for student experience and knowledge to be used within the groups although the approach used is material and subject based, rather than just relying on student experience to provide course content. The union's purpose is to provide a broad educational experience which challenges their members to question social economic and political structures and to review the role of unions in society. They discuss the relationship between national and international questions as well as those between union members.

It is clear from talking to members that the course is an eye-opener for many participants, particularly for those who conceived of the union as having only a limited role. As a result of the experience, some will move from union card-carriers to activists (Dennis McDermott, a former head of the union and CLC President described his stay at Port Elgin in the 1950s as a turning point in his union activism). The experience is also social; contacts are made and members gain an understanding of different work and community situations. Articles and books are read and videos exchanged; newspapers are dissected and discussed. It is always difficult to evaluate the impact of this kind of course. The CAW contends that a majority of participants leave with a heightened union and social consciousness and that a substantial minority are prepared to take on union positions as a result.

A four-week residential membership education program is a model of the kind of PEL that can be won through negotiation. Its future, though, is dependent on what can be achieved in negotiations. A substantial number of students come from plants in the "big three" auto companies and those companies can be affected by layoff and staff reductions. The union is committed to extending the PEL clauses to all its contracts in all of the new sectors merging into CAW. At present approximately 75% of bargaining units, covering 93% of the union's total membership, have negotiated PEL. The biggest threat to the program comes from plant closures which increased in the early 1990s economic recession and the continuing restructuring of the Canadian economy.

It is important to recognize that the employer has no influence over the PEL program. It is not employer-paid time off as experienced in some joint union-management training courses. Once the contract includes a PEL clause the money collected goes into the CAW-PEL trust fund which pays the lost wages and expenses of members who attend the course. The member receives time off without pay from the employer. There is no government influence over the educational program the union offers its members.

This program is now being emulated by CUPW, who have negotiated a three-cents-per-member levy. They have used the Port Elgin facility to run a number of PEL classes alongside CAW courses in preparation for mounting a separate CUPW program.

### **Internationalism: Steelworkers' Humanity Fund Educational Program<sup>5</sup>**

The CAW and CUPW PEL programs are not the only membership education courses to include international issues. A number of unions offer courses specifically on international issues, and given the increasing globalization of capital and the growth of free trade deals it is important to consider how unions have responded educationally to these developments. One of the most distinctive courses is that of the Steelworkers. What follows is a description of a course called *Thinking North-South* developed by the Steelworkers Humanity Fund which is taught in Steelworkers' week-long schools. Rank and file activists drawn from the

<sup>5</sup> The following is a short summary of Marshall (1992).

280 bargaining units which have contributed to the Humanity Fund spend a week together thinking about the workings of the global economy.

Over 110 rank and file workers throughout Canada had participated in the course by 1992. Fifteen had also travelled to visit projects in El Salvador and Peru. The course was offered seven times in a two-year period, 1991 to 1992, using participatory educational methods. Participants map out the workings of the global economy, starting with their own workplace and eventually creating a complex map linking structural adjustment in the south with free trade in the north.

The instructor team, which includes worker-instructors who have done the course and travelled to other countries, have experimented with different approaches. One course included a role play of a press conference given by delegations at an international meeting on hemispheric initiatives. The "Peruvian delegation" and "Canadian delegation" made presentations on current economic policies. The "journalists" were divided into labour and mainstream press.

The course has tackled the question of how the media frames visions of the south as a recipient of charity rather than as a potential partner in solving world problems. One video used was *Simon Ngubane: Still on Strike*, a history of the South African metalworkers. (Responses to it included: "I had no idea there was such a sophisticated trade union movement in South Africa," and "Why does TV just show us black on black violence instead of news on trade unions?")

In addition to teaching internationalism, some Canadian unions sponsor international educational activity. The more extensive understanding of broader national and international context is often the focus of institutional labour studies courses.

### **Institutional Provision of Labour Studies**

As discussed above, university and college provision of labour education is sparse but varied. Two of the more established labour studies programs targeted specifically at trade unionists are at the University of Manitoba and the University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon.

The Manitoba Federation of Labour-University of Manitoba certificate (Friesen, 1993) is a three year program established more than thirty years ago; students take one course per term, three hours a week (two courses per year). Courses include economics, politics, labour law, industrial relations and labour history. Graduating students can proceed to a labour studies degree program.

The University of Saskatchewan Labour Studies Program is run by the College of Commerce and is endorsed by the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour. The program began in 1988, and has attracted over 250 trade unionists. Courses range from *Labour History and the Role of Labour in Society* through *Labour Sociology*, *Labour Economics*, *Women and Work*, *New Technology*, and *Labour Law and Occupational Health and Safety*. After taking six courses over three years, students obtain a university certificate.

Perhaps more typical of labour studies programs in Canada is that offered by Brock University; although a new-five-year-old-program in industrial Ontario (St. Catharines), it is a degree program for mainstream students. With parttime students and evening classes it is possible for labour activists to take classes but it is not targeted at them, nor is there any credit given for union education courses.

Athabasca University, Alberta, provides another recent model of university credit labour studies courses, but as an open, distance university it is able to work directly with unions and the Federation of Labour to provide courses at labour schools (courses have been offered at the AFL Spring School and at the CAW, Port Elgin). Typically, Athabasca students are working adults studying parttime and those that are attracted to labour studies have a union background. Credit is given for some union education courses.

In Quebec, the Université du Québec à Montréal signed an agreement in 1976 with two labour centrals, the Confederation des syndicats nationaux (CSN) and the Quebec Federation of Labour (QFL) and have been providing labour education and research ever since. They are the only substantial institutional provider in Quebec.

Educational institutions offering longer labour studies courses provide union members with the opportunity to investigate substantive knowledge areas beyond their immediate experience, and allow students the time to reflect on labour's place in the political economy and within new social forces. As noted, the above unions are also addressing some of these questions directly on shorter union provided courses, and as a final example of how unions are educationally tackling these broader questions, those courses recently established by the CLC on the environment will be reviewed. This is an important example because it also illustrates labour education's contribution to resolving a controversy within organized labour.

### Unions and the Environment

One of the key aspects of social unionism as defined by Canadian unions is coalition building with other social movements: unions recognise that they need to build links with other social movements if they are to influence public opinion and government policy. This raises an important question. To what extent can organized labour, an old social movement with its established bureaucracy and its own educational practices, adopt the concerns and educational practices of the "new" social movements such as women's groups, peace groups, or environmentalists? If we look at CUPE's program and those of other unions, we can argue that they have done much in this area:

1. Unions offer a number of courses addressing many "new social" issues such as employment equity, sexual or racial harassment.
2. Unions have campaigned for peace and against world poverty.
3. Unions have run campaigns and educational programs targeted primarily at members' behaviour outside the workplace, such as those against violence against women, and substance abuse. The CAW, in particular, runs a

number of short courses on these themes and has some separate programs for women, persons of colour, and physically challenged members.

Environmentalism, however, provides an interesting test for labour. The clash between conservation and economic growth has generally found labour siding with capital in support of development and jobs.<sup>6</sup> In other cases, unions have been split in their support for conservation or development of a particular resource. In the popular image, loggers and pulp and saw mill workers are lined up against environmentalists and native groups in demanding access to BC's forests.

This image is too simplistic. Unionized workers and their organizations are also concerned with longer-term employment; they do not support the despoiling tactics used by some corporations involved in resource extraction. Others live as well as work in the locality of a particular plant, be it mill or mine or municipal dump site. It is their families, not those of shareholders and directors, who breathe in the foul discharge from the pulp mills. There can also be a coincidence of interests in that fewer chemicals in the plant improve the health and safety of workers and reduce the hazardous waste associated with the production process. Also the simplistic presentation of these issues in some media often does not allow for the diversity of opinion among union members. Just as environmentalists and native groups can have differences of opinion on development issues, so, too, can labour. The split between pulp and paper workers (Communications, Energy and Paperworkers [CEP]) and the woodworkers (International Woodworkers of America [IWA]) over forest management in BC is a prime example.

Given this framework, we can now look at the following question. How has organized labour set about developing a policy on the environment and what role has union education played? One of the problems for labour in dealing with environmental questions has been what environmental stance it could adopt. It had no well-developed theory to support its action. This situation changed to some extent with the publication of the Brundtland Commission's report (Brundtland, 1987) and the Commission's enumeration of the principles of "sustainable development." Although this was not a labour movement document, it captured many of labour's concerns with simple conservationism and melded with some existing campaigns around ensuring future work and reduction in hazardous substances. For example, the CLC has been holding conferences on jobs and the environment since 1978. (A few unions have national policies which stand in contradiction to environmental concerns, support for nuclear energy by energy workers and for clear-cutting by the IWA are perhaps the most glaring examples. There can also be splits within unions, for example the desire of chemical workers—CEP members—to see chlorine used in papermaking and the determination of paperworkers—also CEP members—to see it phased out; or CUPE's local 1000, Ontario Hydro's, opposition to CUPE's national policy against nuclear energy).

<sup>6</sup> It can also be argued that some environmental groups are antiworker, see Schrecker (1994).

Labour has argued for a blended approach to the issue of development and the environment. The following stands illustrate this point:

1. The International Chemical and Energy Workers' Federation stated that "to deny the need for economic growth in a world plagued by poverty and undernourishment for the bulk of its population is as unreasonable as to insist that such growth can continue to destroy the natural habitat of mankind without interruption."
2. The CAW have asserted that "workers must have the right to choose both economic security and a healthy environment for ourselves, our families and future generations."
3. Ted Shrecker (1993) argued that this can be achieved via the sustainable development concept which "requires that growth be revived, nationally and globally, *while conserving and enhancing the resource base on which growth depends.*"<sup>7</sup> One of the key elements here is the recognition of the importance of renewable resources.

In order to ensure its perspectives were developed by its own affiliates and their members, the CLC began developing courses for union members. A number of provincial and national conferences preceded course development. In 1993, a one-week course, *Union Environmental Action* was written to be followed by materials on an introductory nine-hour course, *Workers' and the Environment* and a three-hour unit, *Pollution Prevention*, developed primarily for inclusion in other courses. Members attending these courses may also receive a copy of the CLC *Sustainable Development* publication.

Although the publication of these materials suggests a very fixed agenda, the course program allows members to inject their own concerns and examples. However, the goal of the CLC is to get course participants to understand the key issues and struggle with the difficult problems raised. Course participants are expected to read the background information and are supplied with lists of additional readings. Many of the problems raised are open ended with a variety of policy options discussed. The CLC lists different environmental groups and notes where there have been disagreements between these groups and different unions. The possibility for establishing contacts is left open.

In many ways these short courses, particularly the week long *Union Environmental Action* course, are examples of the best traditions of workers' education in which the sociopolitical and socioeconomic context is provided as a basis for consideration of policy decisions and union actions. These courses can be seen as issue based environmentalism, but are not focused on a specific local concern, as might informal learning in a local environmental group. They would provide context for such "learning" and do not preclude local or provincial union organization mounting such an educational event. On the contrary, by sensitising a broader constituency to the issues involved, these courses would be expected to

<sup>7</sup> Many of the examples and general points made in this section are taken from Shrecker (1993).



result in more union environmental actions. Such actions may be a reaction to a particular event, a toxic dump site, for example, or initiated by the union membership as a result of heightened consciousness, for example, auditing company environmental practices.

It is too early to evaluate the success of these courses but a number of features can be noted: (a) the material is discussion-based, beginning with students' experiences to date; (b) course members are provided with background material some of which is "taught" directly on the course, with the remainder provided as background reading; (c) instructors are rarely professional educators; and (d) the courses use lay and full time officials as instructors-facilitators. It should also be noted that labour pays for its own education, including loss of wages, the education grant from the Government of Canada Human Resources Development to the CLC is small and is without strings. All of which means that organised labour can take an independent stance on issues, whereas some environmental pressure groups may be dependent on government grant assistance to support their activities and therefore may be constrained when dealing with some issues.

In addition to CLC initiatives, a number of unions have been mounting their own campaigns. The pulp and paper section of the CEP have a pamphlet, developed from a Swedish pulp and paper union publication, which argues for treating forests as a renewable resource and for zero discharge of chemicals. They have taken this publication to all sections of their membership and run half-day schools explaining union policy.

### Discussion and Evaluation

Union or labour education has been divided into *tool training* for union representatives, *issue* courses which connect workplace and society, and *labour studies* which looks at the broader context of unionism. While these categories overlap, they are nonetheless useful for differentiating between the main purposes of particular courses and how they relate to union organization and goals. Labour education is primarily targeted at representatives or activists in the union and they normally begin with basic *tool training* courses, and then move on to *issues* courses and eventually the more extensive *labour studies* courses and programs. Some unions offer membership (as opposed to representative or activist) education courses and in some cases such courses may more accurately be described as *labour studies* as they examine and explain the context of labour unionism. Labour education in Canada, therefore, can be viewed as having three main purposes:

1. To maintain and sustain union organization and diverse union purposes.
2. To promote change of policy and organizational goals.
3. To develop union consciousness and support social action.

### State Funding

Federal Government support for labour education reached a peak in 1990-1991 of \$8 million, calculated at \$2.11 per capita. In 1994-1995 it was just over \$4 million at \$1.20 per capita. The Government of Canada Human Resources

Development did consider setting up a separate fund to promote its priorities within the Labour Education Program (LEP)<sup>8</sup> (Government of Canada Human Resources Development, 1990, recommendation 1) but it has not done so, preferring to use other funds to promote joint labour management schemes such as participatory management. This has left the LEP as a distinctive state contribution to union controlled education, essentially justified as "a substantial contribution to a more equitable distribution of public funds allocated to industrial relations education" (Government of Canada Human Resources Development, 1990, p. 114). Whilst it is clear that the Federal Government sees LEP funding as essentially contributing to a more "effective operation of the industrial relations system," it also recognises that courses contribute to "the broader labour movement and the community" and to union involvement in "public policy process" (Government of Canada Human Resources Development, 1990, p. 113). What this amounts to is a fairly broad view of the purposes of labour education and a "without strings" approach to granting state funds. LEP funding has directly, or indirectly; e.g., via support for course materials development, assisted a substantial proportion of labour education in Canada. LEP is, however, only funding a part of the labour education provision (Government of Canada Human Resources Development, 1990, p. 102) and makes no contribution to some, such as the CAW and CUPW PEL courses.

### Effectiveness of Labour Education

This brings us to the concluding question. How effective is labour education in Canada? Since unions invest a lot of time and resources in education, over and above those provided by LEP, it is clearly important to them. However, other events in a unionist's life, such as a strike or participation in an actual negotiations, may provide more important and direct learning opportunities than a union course; no matter how carefully crafted, a course may be considered once removed from the actual experience. Nevertheless, unions regard education as underpinning the union effort in the workplace and in the community.

A study sponsored by the CLC in 1990 found that:

1. Members expected to benefit both themselves and the union by taking union courses.
2. The courses helped members to become more interested in the union.
3. Members were able to make better union decisions as a result of attending union courses (Vector, 1990).

Generally members thought courses were too short, but in other ways were content with the course experience.

<sup>8</sup> LEP provides financial assistance to education initiatives of central labour bodies and independent trade unions. It was established in 1977, commencing with a direct contract with the CLC. Currently six central labour organizations and approximately ninety independent unions receive funding from Labour Canada.

While respondents felt the major impact of labour education was on how they did their union work, others included comments on how it changed the way they saw Canadian society (this was particularly notable in respondents from the Atlantic region) and influenced them to become involved in local politics and community actions. On the evidence of this study, the CLC's labour education programs clearly worked as a promoter of "social unionism" and the programs also worked as "education." Most students wanted more educational opportunity, preferably using the same format, but with two out of three also stating they were interested in taking labour courses at home.

In conclusion, the survey enhances the perception of union officials that education supports union activism. The link between education and activism was also confirmed in the Government of Canada Human Resources Development LEP study which included a survey of Labour College of Canada students (Government of Canada Human Resources Development, 1990, p. 75-84). Labour education, organization and activism are linked. The CLC's National Coordinator of Program Development, Danny Mallet, has argued that the diverse educational provision of Canadian unions has been a major factor in the growth of labour unionism in Canada during a period of international decline (personal communication, July 1994) (for example, in the last ten years unions in Canada have retained a density of approximately 37% with an increasing workforce and have therefore increased their membership, whereas unions in the USA, UK, Australia, and New Zealand have suffered declines in density and actual members of between one-quarter and one-half in the same time period).

### Conclusion

This survey of labour education in Canada has illustrated the diversity and vibrancy of current provision. Future research will explore US, Australian and New Zealand labour education (and update the reports on the UK) and contrast union education responses to the globalization and restructuring of capital and labour markets. In this regard the withdrawal of state funding in the UK and New Zealand and the decline in federal support in Canada and Australia is significant, as is the move towards credentializing of union training across all five countries. The emphasis unions are giving to worker training also needs elaboration, as do the links between unions and public education bodies. Unions are beginning to use electronic and other forms of distance education to combat corporate global strategies and are rediscovering the importance of a "union conscious" as well as a skilled leadership and membership. The implications that all of these factors have for labour education curriculum, methods, students and tutors need to be examined.

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