

# Workshop on Canadian Working-Class History

## Victoria, May 1990

### *The Writing of Canadian Working-Class History in the 1980s: Ten Good Years?*

Panelist: Kathryn McPherson (York)  
Ian McKay (Queen's) Text not available.  
Jacques Ferland (Maine) Text not available.

### Feminist Reflections on the Writing of Canadian Working Class History in the 1980s

Kathryn McPherson

OVER THE PAST TEN YEARS the number of studies in Canadian working class history has increased dramatically. In part, that growth has been the function of the proliferation of research on working class women. Historians have examined women working in the manufacturing sector, be it in the textile, boot and shoe, garment, salmon canning or confectionery industries and explored the ways in which women's experiences in industrial production intersected with and differed from those of their male counterparts.<sup>1</sup> Other researchers, however, focused on

<sup>1</sup>See for example, Gail Cuthbert Brandt, "'Weaving It Together': Life Cycle and the Industrial Experience of Female Cotton Workers in Quebec, 1910-1959," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 7 (Spring 1981), 113-26; Margaret E. McCallum, "Separate Spheres, the Organization of Work in a Confectionery Factory: Ganong Bros., St. Stephen, New Brunswick," *Labour/Le Travail*, 24 (Fall 1989), 69-90; Alicja Muszynski, "Race and gender: structural determinants in the formation of British Columbia's salmon cannery labour forces," *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 13 (1988); and Laura C. Johnson with Robert E. Johnson, *The Seam Allowance: Industrial Home Sewing in Canada*, (Toronto 1982).

occupational groups outside the traditional purview of labour studies, the women employed in the white collar world of clerical, sales, teaching, health care and domestic employment.<sup>2</sup> Recognizing the significance to women workers of what Graham Lowe has termed the "administrative revolution," these scholars have introduced into working class history a new cast of characters, with specific sets of workplace experiences, and as such have played a critical role in asking new questions regarding a redefining of who constitutes a worker, and what constitutes work.

Not only have feminist researchers illuminated the process and effects of sex-segmentation in the workplace, so too have they investigated the ways in which specific groups of women workers did or did not act collectively to defend their occupational interests. Studies analyzing strikes by women workers, as well as women's roles within the union movement and within working class political organizations, have probed the often uneasy relationship between male workers and their union sisters.<sup>3</sup> This approach has done much to help us understand the limitations on collective action faced by women in industrial occupations. However, the focus on trade unionism poses problems when trying to study white collar and service workers who formed organizations which did not conform to the trade union format. This pertains to teachers, nurses, and sales clerks whose associational vehicles, like as the Manitoba Graduate Nurses' Association, struggled to improve workplace conditions, but often refused to utilize trade union tactics to do so, and certainly resisted affiliation with the labour movement. While the union movement has been critiqued for its failure to include women workers, or to address women's issues, there have also been many instances where women white collar workers themselves rejected the trade union movement in favour of alternate organizational vehicles — vehicles which addressed gender-specific features of the workplace and the workforce. Further research into overt and covert resistance of women working in both the secondary and tertiary sectors may continue to challenge

<sup>2</sup>Graham Lowe, *The Administrative Revolution: The Feminization of Clerical Work*, (Toronto 1987); Marta Danylewycz and Alison Prentice, "Teachers' Work: Changing Patterns and Perceptions in the Emerging School Systems of Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Central Canada," *Labour/Le Travail*, 17 (Spring 1986), 59-80; Kathryn McPherson, "Skilled Service and Women's Work: Canadian Nursing 1920-1939," PhD dissertation, Simon Fraser University, 1989. This literature would also include the many articles on paid domestic workers, as well as the studies of unpaid domestic work in the home, see for example, Veronica Strong-Boag, "Keeping House in God's Country: Canadian Women at Work in the Home," in Craig Heron and Robert Storey, eds., *On the Job: Confronting the Labour Process in Canada*, (Kingston 1986), 124-51.

<sup>3</sup>For example see, Jacques Ferland, "'In Search of the Unbound Prometheus': A Comparative View of Women's Activism in Two Quebec Industries, 1869-1908," *Labour/Le Travail*, 24 (Fall 1989), 11-44; Linda Briskin and Lynda Yantz, eds., *Union Sisters: Women in the Labour Movement*, (Toronto 1983); Linda Kealey and Joan Sangster, eds., *Beyond the Vote: Canadian Women and Politics* (Toronto 1989); and Joan Sangster, *Dreams of Equality: Women on the Canadian Left, 1920-1950*, (Toronto 1989).

existing class theory, but will certainly expand our understanding of class formation and the development of sex/gender systems.

Clearly, the emphasis upon specific female-dominated occupations has proven a fruitful approach to writing the history of working class women. In doing so, historians of women have followed the lead of male labour historians who have focused on the men of steel, bushworkers, coal miners, and many other occupational groups. However, structuring research around particular occupations or industries may create a new problem. As Barbara Todd has suggested for working women in 17th-century England, perhaps studying workers by distinct occupational groups blinds us to one of the defining features of the work experience of both men and women in the past, mobility.<sup>4</sup> Many workers moved from job to job, and did not define themselves by one occupation, as historians tend to do. Working for a single employer in a single trade may have been the exception rather than the rule, particularly prior to 1945. Research on 20th-century nurses demonstrates this point. Not only did nurses move from town to town, in and out of paid labour, and from sector to sector of the health care system, but they also shifted from occupation to occupation. Nurses moved to and from clerical work, teaching, domestic employment and sales. Even in an occupation which had apprenticeship training, formal certification, and strong associational vehicles — all unusual within women's occupations — there was a significant amount of intra-occupational mobility. Perhaps some form of life cycle approach might be useful in capturing this important feature of working life in the past.

Of course, not all Canadian working class history in the 1980s focused exclusively on specific workplace experiences. Over the past decades working class historians have participated in the international trend toward studying non-workplace features of working class life, such as leisure, family structure, ethnicity and religion. One of the kinds of labour history that I thought would be written more in the 1980s, and has not been popular in Canada, is the community study. This genre has been very popular within American labour and social history in the 1970s and 1980s. Allen Dawley's Lynn, Massachusetts, John Cumbler's study of *Working Class Community* in Lynn and Fall River, the *Women of Troy*, and Couvares' Pittsburgh, are all well known examples of a genre of labour history which has not been matched in Canada. Even Winnipeg, home of the 1919 General Strike has received no booklength examination other than Allen Artibise's study to 1914. Thus while Canadian labour history has demonstrated a remarkable regional balance, the sense of place that studies of particular neighbourhoods, communities and cities brings is largely missing. For women, many of whom left paid work upon marriage or pregnancy, the intersection of home, work and

<sup>4</sup>Barbara Todd, "Women's Work in Early Modern English Towns: Reconsidering Women's Occupations and the Theory of 'Family Production' in Urban Settings," unpublished papers presented Graduate Colloquium on Women and Work, McMaster University, 10 February 1990.

community was an especially important facet of working class life. Research devoted to specific neighbourhoods or towns promises to enhance our understanding of the dialectic of women's productive and reproductive responsibilities.

Another area of research which needs further work is that of women's role in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, in the transition from a pre-industrial to industrial capitalist economy. In France, England and the United States, the first sectors of the economy to be transformed by capitalism and industrialism were those dominated by women in the countryside, the textile industry in particular. Marjorie Cohen has argued for the importance of women's reproductive activities in maintaining an underemployed, seasonal workforce in early 19th century Ontario, as well as the masculinization over the course of the 1800s of industries such as dairy production.<sup>5</sup> Research on 19th century Montreal has revealed the importance of women in certain trades, and the substantial presence of women in industrial production at mid-century.<sup>6</sup> Further investigation of women's work in the transition is required not only to understand how and if women were producing surplus goods for the developing market, and whether the emergence of capitalist relations influenced women's relative roles in production and reproduction, but also the importance of gender roles themselves in influencing the pattern of capitalist development in British North America.

This latter point speaks to the larger goal of feminist research, to not only writing women into history but also to write women's history into history. Over the past decade, feminist scholars have been striving to illustrate what women were experiencing and how they reacted to those experiences, thereby redefining who constitutes a worker. This research has also addressed questions pertaining to the construction of femininity and masculinity in a particular time and place, and to the agency of gender, and gender relations, as causal forces of historical change. In recent years, growing numbers of authors have examined how masculinity or manliness, as well as femininity, have informed their historical subjects. Many now agree that the working class was/is gendered. However, the focus of debate around sex/gender systems and class has changed dramatically. In the early 1980s, the influences of theorists such as Heidi Hartmann, Roberta Hamilton, and Sheila Rowbotham were strong.<sup>7</sup> These authors and others grappled with questions of the material bases of gender and class consciousness and debated as to whether

<sup>5</sup>Marjorie Cohen, *Women's Work, Markets, and Economic Development in Nineteenth-Century Ontario*, (Toronto 1988).

<sup>6</sup>McGill University's Montreal Business History Project has uncovered a wealth of documentation pertaining to skilled tradespeople in that city; see also D. Suzanne Cross, "The Neglected Majority: The Changing Role of Women in 19th Century Montreal," in Susan Mann Trofimenkoff and Alison Prentice, eds., *The Neglected Majority: Essays in Canadian Women's History*, (Toronto 1977).

<sup>7</sup>Heidi Hartmann, "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union," in Lydia Sargent, ed., *Women and Revolution*, (Boston 1981).

Marxian categories were elastic enough to accommodate serious analysis of gender. Works such as Hartmann's "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism" or those within the "Domestic Labour Debate"<sup>8</sup> defined the terrain on which scholars addressed the dialectics of production and reproduction.

By the close of the decade, however, the focus of debate had changed substantially. For some labour historians, acknowledging that gender, as well as race and ethnicity, mattered in the past has inspired a shift away from the theoretical debate of class versus gender versus race, and toward empirical investigations of how class, and gender and race and ethnicity interacted in the past. A more fundamental shift has occurred, however, as the emergence of post-structuralism has redefined the political alignments within working scholarship. Post-structuralism, and its emphasis on the "multifacetedness" of consciousness, has provided some authors with a theoretical resolution of the production/reproduction and class/gender dichotomies. For others, the older divisions between Marxists and Feminists have been overshadowed, and perhaps even dissolved, by the new debates within Marxism and within Feminism over the relevance and worth of a materialist approach as compared to the more idealist post-structuralism. Can post-structuralism be used as a tool within the broader materialist analysis, or is post-structuralism antithetical to both materialism and activism?

For many, this will be the terrain upon which students will focus their reading of Canadian working class history in the 1990s. Yet, these new theoretical and empirical questions have been accompanied by other changes in the process of thinking and writing about labour history. When I began my graduate work at Dalhousie University in 1980 a very different climate of study prevailed, even within the institutional framework. There were no jobs in academia; people who pursued an education in working class history did so for very different reasons, (certainly not go get ahead financially) and with a commitment to the collective process of studying the past. For me, these feminist reflections on Canadian Working Class History are the product of that collective engagement with both feminist and working class history, a process in which I participated within my academic programs, but also within non-institutional forums such as the Vancouver Labour History Group. That collective process, so influential in the 1980s, is well-worth retaining and nurturing as we continue to explore the lives of working people in our past.

<sup>8</sup>See for example, Bonnie Fox, ed., *Hidden in the Household: Women's Domestic Labour Under Capitalism*, (Toronto 1982); and Roberta Hamilton and Michèle Barret, eds., *The Politics of Diversity: Feminism, Marxism and Nationalism*, (Montreal 1986).

## *The British Columbia Working Class: New Perspectives*

Panelists: James Conley (Trent)  
Gillian Creese (UBC)  
Peter Seixas (Vancouver)

### Peculiarities of the British Columbians

James R. Conley

THINKING ABOUT MY TALK FOR TODAY, I started wondering what distinctive perspective I was expected to contribute to this panel. I don't know what Craig Heron had in mind, but I've decided to take on the role of outsider. I do this in two ways: first, as far as I know, I am the only member of this panel who has never lived in British Columbia; second I am a sociologist (a status I share with Gillian Creese), not a historian. Each of these outsider roles leads to a different (and I hope new) perspective on the history of the BC working class.

For the first new perspective, I take my cue from the Minutes of the 1989 Annual Meeting of the Committee on Canadian Labour History, which refers to "a panel on the peculiarities of the British Columbians." The province is peculiar, different, perhaps even (according to its Premier) distinct. That is why someone from the Prairies such as myself is interested in the history of British Columbia workers. The extent of unionization, the strength of the left in working-class organizations, the complex interaction of racial and class divisions, and the dramatic labour struggles of its past (and no doubt its future), all contribute to making BC working-class history special. But how special? In what ways and for what reasons?

In the past, the writing of BC history has been described as provincial, in the pejorative sense of inward-looking and narrowly self-preoccupied. The writing of the history of BC workers has largely avoided that provincialism, especially in the last decade. It has done this primarily by putting BC workers' history in the context of national, continental, and (to a lesser extent) international trends: tendencies in capitalist development, transformations of the labour process and labour markets, processes of class formation, union organization, and working-class politics. This is what I've tried to do in my own work on the early 20th-century Vancouver working class, especially in trying to explain the labour revolt of 1917-1919. Many

other more-worthy examples could be cited, including the contributions of others on this panel.

But it is time, I think, to go beyond merely putting BC working-class history into a broader context. The next step is to engage in more explicitly comparative history. Comparisons need to be made in at least two directions: north-south and west-east.

With regard to north-south comparisons, I've been studying the 1911 general strike in the Vancouver building trades, and find that what was going on in Vancouver cannot be understood without knowing also what was going on in San Francisco (that other west coast labour stronghold) and Los Angeles (the bastion of the open shop). Especially for the early 1900s, when there was one coastal labour market that crossed the international boundary, we would benefit from more comparative historical analysis. Yet except for Carlos Schwantes' pioneering but flawed comparison of labour radicalism in Washington and British Columbia, and Elizabeth Lees' very interesting comparisons of shipyard workers in Vancouver and Seattle, north-south comparisons are notable by their absence. Especially in the context of free trade, we need to do comparative work to contribute what we can to the historical understanding of labour's current struggles.

Likewise, we need west-east comparisons. If we are to understand the extent to which BC labour history is different, and why, we need to compare. For example, in my own work on the 1917-1919 labour revolt, studying Vancouver workers has led me to explanations that need to be explored in comparisons with other Canadian cities east of the Rockies. A question from a different period that requires a comparative answer is: why has BC been such an important site for nationalist unions, such as CAIMAW, the Pulp, Paper and Woodworkers, and the Independent Canadian Transit Union?

My second outsider role is as a sociologist, albeit an historical one. As a sociologist, I am beginning to find the subdisciplinary boundary between working-class history and business history immensely frustrating. How can we talk about workers without talking about bosses, labour without capital?

As Jacques Ferland recently argued, business history is too important to be left to the likes of Michael Bliss. Too much of the history of capital in BC has been celebratory, and not enough has addressed the questions of interest to working-class history. Yet, as historians (and sociologists) of the working class, we need to pay attention to what I would call the contingent strategies of capital accumulation undertaken by capitalist employers. By looking at business strategies — at the level of individual firms, associations, and the state — we can gain further insight into workers' experience. We can examine the ways workers have been affected by such strategies (in the short-term and long-term), the ways they have resisted and accommodated to them in the workplace and in working-class households and communities and the ways in which their responses have shaped subsequent business strategies.

I have proposed an ambitious, perhaps presumptuous agenda (such are the risks of the outsider role), and there are many difficulties in the way of its realization.<sup>1</sup> But the difficulties are not insurmountable, as shown by excellent comparative studies such as Robert Babcock's in Maine and New Brunswick, and Joy Parr's in Ontario.

In conclusion, I can perhaps use the words of two important figures in working-class history. When I was originally thinking about the state of BC working-class history for this panel, I was tempted to echo Sam Gompers and say we needed "more, more, more." I now think Lenin would be more appropriate: "not more, but better." Being more comparative, and integrating the study of business strategies with the history of workers, are two ways the writing of BC working-class history could be made better.

<sup>1</sup>The reason I have often referred to my own work above is that I don't feel I should be recommending paths that I am not willing to take.

## The British Columbia Working Class: New Perspectives on Ethnicity/Race and Gender

Gillian Creese

I HAVE BEEN ASKED TO SAY A FEW WORDS about new perspectives on ethnicity and gender in BC working class history. When I was first asked to take part in this symposium I must admit that I was hesitant that I, as a sociologist, has anything very useful to tell historians about new approaches to working-class history in British Columbia. But on reflection perhaps it is important for social scientists to be sitting on this panel. Much of the recent research on women and minority members of the working class that has contributed new insights into working-class history has been influenced by the theoretical contributions made by sociology, by other social sciences, and most of all, by feminist theory.

The new perspectives that I want to talk about today are not post-structuralism, post-marxism or discourse theory, but movements toward a 'new' political economy that is influenced by some of these critiques. A political economy approach that rejects economistic conceptions of class, and encompasses a greater sense of the complexity of class relations; an approach that recognizes that while capitalist relations are central to our understanding of work and working-class life, other



relations of power, domination, and inequality shape class relations. In short, an approach that conceptualizes classes as gendered and racialized social relationships.

Feminist scholars from all disciplines have made us aware that in British Columbia, as elsewhere in Canada, patriarchal relations of male domination and female subordination shape the lives of men and women of all classes, and in all spheres of their lives, although certainly not always in the same form. Similarly, sociologists have long pointed to the importance of ethnic/race relations of inequality that cut across class and gender division. In British Columbia, for example, the ethnic/racial divisions between Asians, Aboriginal, and white (European) men and women have pervaded the history of this society.

What does this mean for the study of the BC working class? It means that we must begin from the realization that workers are not, and never were, all the same, and cannot be treated in historical research only as 'workers'. There was and is no such thing as a neutral unit of labour, no unmodified 'worker' to which everyone else can be compared.

Workers come in two sexes and, historically in BC, workers came in three main ethnic/racial groups. These are not secondary distinctions of marginal importance in working-class historiography, these are fundamental ways that people's lives, including their working lives and their experiences of class relations, have been shaped.

When we look at employment practices in early 20th-century British Columbia, for example, it is clear that employers hired people according to assumptions about their sex and their ethnic/racial origin. Chinese men were considered good for one kind of work, white women were good for another, aboriginal women were good for yet another, and white men were good for another still. The type of work available, the wages, the conditions of work, the relations with other workers, the involvement in labour politics, in fact one's basic citizenship rights in the entire society, all were fundamentally defined by the sex and the ethnic/racial origin of the worker.

Ethnic/racial and gender relations of power and domination are embedded within capitalist practices. The class relations that are thereby generated are not gender and ethnically/racially neutral in form; rather, classes are gendered and racialized. It should not be surprising then that ethnicity/race and gender shape workers concrete experiences of class relations.

It is not easy to overcome the sexism and racism embedded in a tradition of working-class historiography that, like other intellectual endeavours, for a very long time silenced the realities of women and minority workers. We have certainly gone well beyond the women and/or minority workers as 'victim' to view women and/or minority workers as historical actors; but now gender has come narrowly to specify women's lives, and ethnicity/race narrowly to specify the lives of minorities.

There is, for example, a tendency to assume that gender is important only when we research the lives of working women. In fact, gender relations are as important for understanding the experiences of male workers as for female workers. For male

workers, gender appears significant in the form of the gender privilege it entails, but it nonetheless appears as an important set of relations shaping class experiences. We all recognize that an exploration of the subordination of women and their primary role in the home is important for understanding women's lesser involvement in trade union politics, the parameters of 'women's work,' or the nature of women's involvement in community politics. But gender relations are just as important for understanding why the early trade union movement was largely male, why it followed some strategies rather than others, why some jobs were 'men's jobs,' or why the 'family wage' only applied to men.

Similar observations can be made in reference to ethnicity/race, suggesting the need explicitly to problematize ethnicity/race in our research on working-class history. Whether ethnicity/race is an important division shaping class behaviour at specific times and in specific places is an empirical question. But here too, ethnic privilege is the other side of ethnic subordination, and ethnic privilege equally shapes class relations. Differences in rights and privileges between white and Asian male workers in British Columbia, for example, affected both groups profoundly in all spheres of their lives, including the kinds of jobs they had access to, the wages they could earn, where they could live, and whether they could vote. These differences, premised on the ethnic/racial hierarchy in British Columbia, also figures prominently in the development of the labour movement.

So far there has been little consideration of the importance of gender relations of power and domination in the study of male workers, and even less in the study of male minority workers, or of the importance of racial/ethnic privilege in the lives of white male or female workers. There continues to be less qualification of the specificity of most research than there should be, even though these critiques have been made for a long time. The truism of marginality still remains; unspecified gender means male; unspecified ethnicity/race means white; specified gender means white women; and specified ethnicity/race means minority men. And only when we specify these 'residual categories' are they important in our thinking at all.

This is largely a conceptual problem. We have conceptualized gender and ethnicity/race as add-ons to a class analysis, rather than re-conceptualizing class as gendered and racialized social relationships. The view I am putting forward is part of the re-conceptualization of class as relations that are fundamentally shaped by gender and ethnicity for all workers in racist and patriarchal capitalist societies, and not only for those who are part of the most subordinated groups.

I am not suggesting that the experiences of men and women or white and minority workers are never the same. No doubt they often are. But the differences and similarities that exist are important issues to address in our research. Indeed, given the centrality of gender, ethnicity/race, and class in people's lives, as well as linkages among these forms of oppression, these are crucial questions to address if we want a fuller understanding of working-class life in any particular period. I am also suggesting that historical research should be theoretically-informed by the social sciences, and especially by feminist theory, because it is here that the larger

questions of the relationship between ethnicity/race, gender, and class are currently being addressed.

## Teaching Working Class History in B.C.

Peter Seixas

ONE MIGHT EXPECT that the new Canadian social, labour, and working-class history of the past twenty years had filtered from the university to the secondary schools of British Columbia. Has it? One of the easiest ways to find out is to scan high school textbooks and examine their treatment of these areas.

In 1980, Kenneth Osborne laid the groundwork by surveying the portrayal of workers in 29 Canadian textbooks published between 1886 and 1979.<sup>1</sup> The picture was dismal. Not surprisingly, he found that working class-history and social history were largely hidden behind walls of political and constitutional history, but that there were certain windows through which students might catch a glimpse. These windows occurred most predictably as: Life in New France, the Loyalists or Pioneers, the Settlement of the West, and the Depression. Textbooks published in the 1970s also included a look at the Winnipeg General Strike.

However, Osbornes' most devastating charge concerned not the textbooks' errors of omission, but errors of commission. Where the books did examine the lives of ordinary people — workers and their families — they consistently minimized social conflict, thus suggesting the quotation Osborne selected for his title: "Hard-working, Temperate, and Peaceable." Workers' part in shaping history was repeatedly denied or trivialized, while their attitudes were portrayed as consistently complacent. Osborne provided wonderfully entertaining examples:

How does something as big as a railway or a hydroelectric project or a pipeline actually get built? Businessmen or politicians set the objectives; surveyors and engineers draw up the plans of the project and provide on-the-job expertise; skilled and unskilled workers turn the plans into their final physical form. But who ensures that objectives and skills are brought together to successfully complete the project? That is the job of the organizer, and the CPR could not have found a better one than Van Horne.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Kenneth W. Osborne, "Hardworking, Temperate and Peaceable" — *The Portrayal of Workers in Canadian History Textbooks* (Winnipeg 1980).

<sup>2</sup>R. Stewart and N. McLean, *Forming a Nation: the Story of Canada and Canadians* (Toronto 1978), II, 88, quoted in Osborne, *Hardworking*, 39.

Consider the even more blunt: "...it was William Van Horne who actually built the Canadian Pacific Railway."<sup>3</sup>

One text included a vignette of a fictional CPR worker with the following description:

Lars Peterson ... was one of the best 'spikers' in the business. When Van Horne had a contest to see which team could put down the most track in one day, Lars was chosen to be a member of one of the teams. His crew showed great team work. They broke all records. In one day they laid 10.3 km of track — 8400 hammer blows per man in a ten-hour day ... Lars loved the adventure of seeing the ribbon of steel leap ahead of them towards the Pacific. He was content to enjoy the fun and friendship of the camp and let the future take care of itself. (45)<sup>4</sup>

Osborne concludes:

It is not that these ... descriptions are necessarily false. There must have been men such as these ... It is the selection that raises questions. All are hard-working. All are happy in their jobs. None has any complaint, nor, apparently, any grounds for complaint. All would gladden the heart of any personnel manager. But who speaks for the discontented, the injured, the aggrieved, the exploited? The textbook answer is, of course, that they do not exist — at least before 1919.<sup>5</sup>

Class conflict does surface in the texts' version of the strike wave of 1919, but the one text which covers the strike in most depth concludes: "The Winnipeg General Strike was a bitter experience for both workers and owners. However, both sides learned a lesson. From this time on, labourers and owners were more tolerant of each other."<sup>6</sup>

Has anything changed in the presentation of the past to high school students? Over the past few years, British Columbia has implemented a new social studies curriculum including new prescribed textbooks, some of which were designed specifically for the new courses. Canadian history is taught in Grades 9, 10, and 11, with a chronological development to 1815 in Grade 9, through the 19th century in Grade 10, and through the 20th in Grade 11.<sup>7</sup>

Vivien Bowers' and Stan Garrod's *Our Land: Building the West* is the prescribed text for the grade 10 level.<sup>8</sup> Divided into four sections, the first two are organized as chronological history: Unit I, "Action in the East," is a traditional

<sup>3</sup>D. Willows and S. Richmond, *Canada: Colony to Centennial* (Toronto 1969), 270, quoted in Osborne, *Hardworking*, 37.

<sup>4</sup>J.B. Cruxton and W.D. Wilson, *Flashback Canada* (Toronto 1978), 217, quoted in Osborne, *Hardworking*, 45.

<sup>5</sup>Osborne, *Hardworking*, 45.

<sup>6</sup>Cruxton and Wilson, 367, quoted in Osborne, *Hardworking*, 65.

<sup>7</sup>British Columbia Ministry of Education, *Social Studies Curriculum Guide* (Victoria 1988).

<sup>8</sup>Vivien Bowers and Stan Garrod, *Our Land: Building the West* (Toronto 1987).

account using constitutional development as the primary framework. Unit II, "Development of the West" also has an explicitly historical framework. Unit III ("Canada's Economic Activities") and IV ("British Columbia Makes a Living") include historical information on each of the topics, but are not organized historically. Thus, in the topical chapter on "The Forest Industry" in Unit IV there is one subsection on its history. The introductory chapter to Unit III, "Canada's Economic Activities" includes a seven-page section, "Canada's Working People: A Brief History." Set against some of the problems Osborne documented, this account represents considerable progress. Without using the work "class," it discusses the squeezing of independent producers by late-19th century factory development, and their "transformation into hired workers." (243) The birth and development of unions are placed in the context of factories where "wages were low, hours long, and injuries common." (242) Skilled workers' involvement in the Toronto Printers' Strike and the formation of the Trades and Labor Congress are followed by discussion of the plight of unskilled workers, and the BC coal miners' struggles of the early 1900s. "When workers set up picket lines, the employers, backed up by police or militia, would force passage for 'scabs.'" (343) From here, the text jumps to a brief organizational history tracing the TLC to the CCL to the CLC; then quickly on to the "past two decades," mentioning the growth in unionization of women and civil servants, then a non-historical section on the growth of tertiary sector employment. A half-page inset tells the story of the Winnipeg General Strike.

*Our Land's* messages are that workers had significant grievances, there was struggle, the state entered the struggle on the side of employers, and that unions played a critical role in improving the conditions of workers' lives. Following the labour history with recent changes in tertiary sector employment could set the stage for student research and discussion of the conditions of work and the struggles of workers in the 1990s. The problem is, however, the extraordinarily brief nature of the labour history section itself. Responses to an informal survey of Vancouver social studies teachers on use of "Canada's Working People: A Brief History" included several which mentioned the problem of its brevity: one called the historical interludes of Unit III "ludicrous." Some teachers omitted the section in their teaching: one noted that "Social Studies 10 is a smorgasbord of content-laden topics: there's no time." One found herself able to refer to the section throughout the remainder of the course. Others used the chapter as a springboard from which to introduce other labour history materials.<sup>9</sup>

The new Grade 11 history text is one of a trilogy entitled *Towards Tomorrow: Canada in a Changing World* (the other two volumes concern geography and government.)<sup>10</sup> They have been in the schools for one year. The history volume,

<sup>9</sup>These were responses to a two-page questionnaire sent to the eighteen Vancouver Social Studies department heads in the Spring of 1990. I received nine responses from five schools.

<sup>10</sup>Desmond Morton, *Towards Tomorrow: Canada in a Changing World: History* (Toronto 1988).

written by Desmond Morton, has a considerably more promising approach to labour history and social history. As we might expect from Morton, there is a generous portion of social history.

The introduction uses examples from social history to discuss some of the difficulties in constructing a picture of the past. A table from Udo Sautter's article on the measurement of unemployment shows estimates which differed by 8.4 percentage points for 1932. Morton thus demonstrates the problematical nature of historical "facts" even *before* one confronts the difficulties of interpretation.

Through the text, I counted six areas of significant concentration on social conditions and/or working class history:

Laurier Era immigration (14-9),  
 Living conditions in the Laurier era (20-4),  
 Labour unrest after World War I (69-70),  
 Unemployment, living conditions, the Depression (79-97),  
 World War II era militancy, strikes, social reform (131-2),  
 Unemployment, inflation, and the response (1976 Day of Protest against wage controls, 1976) in the 1970s. (191-3)

Unlike Osborne's texts, Morton includes ample treatment of working-class hardship. In Laurier's Canada,

increasing urbanization brought about by industrial development created a growing class of Canadians who lived on the edge of starvation .... Social and political critics saw the plight of the poor as evidence that the social order and capitalism were not working. (23)

The facing page shows a photograph with the caption, "Switchboard operators work under the close scrutiny of their supervisors." Nor does conflict and resistance disappear after the wars. A photograph of demonstrators, raising their clenched fists in front of the Parliament Buildings, shows a sign saying "Postal workers against wage controls." The caption reads, "Labour representatives protest against the wage and price controls enacted by the federal government to fight inflation. Why did governments and business blame unions for inflation?" The text, after explaining the role of the devaluation of US dollar and OPEC price-hikes, explains: "There were many popular scapegoats for inflation, from landlords to labour unions." (192-3)

The teachers I surveyed had few responses to the Morton text, perhaps because of how recently it had been introduced. In the long term, the integration of labour and social concerns in a systematic historical treatment seems more promising than the encapsulated tidbits of the past offered in *Our Land: Building the West*. An integrated history gives students a chance to analyze the process of change over time, to pose questions of their own about the interplay of political, economic, and

social forces, and to examine the role of ordinary people in responding to and shaping change.

Set against the pre-1980 textbooks, the two texts prescribed for BC's Grade 10 and 11 seem to encourage cautious optimism about improvements in the presentation of labour and social history. As every student knows, however, a textbook is not a course. Teachers' knowledge and attitudes are critical, as is the availability of supplementary materials. Labour and working-class historians who wonder if their debates are too esoteric or trendy, who worry that they have lost touch with an audience beyond other historians, might do well to consider the contributions they could make by addressing teachers and students in the secondary schools. Nowhere else in North American culture is there such an audience waiting for the insights which historians have to offer.

## *Labour Historians and Unions: Assessing the Interaction*

Panelists: Elaine Bernard (Harvard)

Michael Piva (Ottawa)

Raymond Leger (New Brunswick Federation of Labour)

## Labour Programmes: A Challenging Partnership

Elaine Bernard

IN BOTH CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES, organized labour and post-secondary institutions are not typically viewed as natural allies. For the most part, organized labour has been suspicious of post-secondary institutions, viewing them as pro-business bastions of privilege. Universities and colleges either have tended to ignore organized labour, or have had small extensions programmes with offerings which parallel unions' own internal education programmes.

In this paper, I will examine the history and evolution of two labour/trade union programmes, the Harvard Trade Union Program (TUP) (started in 1942) and the Simon Fraser University Labour Program (started in 1975). While these programmes have very different histories and evolution, they share important common elements which have been central to their success. These include: an agreement between labour and the university on appropriateness of programme offerings,

separate labour and academic programme advisory committees, significant university regular-faculty involvement in the programme, and mutual respect for the knowledge, norms, sensitivities, and accountability of both organizations. Each of these elements will be discussed in terms of the evolution of the Harvard Trade Union Program and the Simon Fraser University Labour Program.

Before proceeding with the two cases, it is valuable to look at some of the barriers to a partnership with labour, and what is meant by "partnership" and "labour programmes." The term "partnership" is an important concept. It suggests more than simply an approach or marketing strategy aimed at a particular group. It implies, and indeed, requires a process of mutual learning and respect with continuing association and collaboration.

A partnership with labour requires considerable time and energy. Labour differs in a number of ways from many traditional client groups. The labour movement is organized as a group with its own leadership, structures, policies, and objectives. It designs and delivers its own programmes. Labour often perceives post-secondary institutions with some hostility. There is a feeling that educational institutions historically have tended to usurp labour's own educational role, whether in craft training or labour education.<sup>1</sup> In addition, labour is critical of what they see as the exclusive nature of institutions of higher learning. Most unionists believe universities and colleges have explicit business, management, and professional orientation and bias.

Universities are, of course, more than simply teaching institutions. Yet, even in the area of research there is some tension between labour and academics. A recent study on "Academic Research on Labour: Strengthening Union-University Links," aptly outlines some of the problems.

Labour leaders seem to believe that most academic research is either esoteric, irrelevant, or management oriented. In their view, there is very little university research that is useful to labour either in promoting a better understanding of working-class aspirations, challenges facing labour and their organizations, new management agenda and emerging changes in work organization, or in devising effective responses and strategies to meet the growing assault from capital and the state. Academics, on the other hand, feel frustrated with labour's inability to appreciate either the goals of scholarly research or the multiple solitudes of the industrial relations discipline. They often complain that unions tend to be defensive, short-sighted, only interested in popular partisan analysis rather than basic research, have a stereotyped image of academics, and are generally distrustful of their motives.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Canadian Labour Congress, "The Relationship Between the Canadian Labour Congress and Post-Secondary Institutions," (Ottawa 1989), 3.

<sup>2</sup>Pradeep Kumar, "Academic Research on Labour: Strengthening Union-University Links," Canadian Labour Market and Productivity Centre, Ottawa, 15-17 May 1989, 1.



One final area of friction is labour's belief that good labour education is explicitly ideological in character, with the goal of making better trade unionists.<sup>3</sup> In the current social environment, the goal of becoming a "trade unionist," much less an effective one, is seen as a politically charged issue. It is a sad political reality in the United States and Canada that while business programmes explicitly aimed at touting the virtues of "privatization" or "entrepreneurism" are viewed as acceptable, "labour programmes" are still forced to take the defensive against charges of "advocacy."

Organized labour, in the eyes of post-secondary institutions, has often been viewed as just another special interest group, though its sheer numbers and breadth should indicate that special attention is warranted. In the United States, for example where labour has been steadily declining since the early 1960s, it still constitutes a remarkable 17.5 per cent of the workforce.<sup>4</sup> In Canada, on the other hand, where labour organization has continued to grow, its stands today at 37 per cent of the national workforce.<sup>5</sup>

The term "labour programmes" or "labour education" in reference to post-secondary education has been used in North America to cover a wide variety of programmes spanning from traditional liberal education for workers to the study by academics of the lives and activities of working people.<sup>6</sup> In this paper, the term labour programmes designates programmes designed, organized, and delivered in partnership with the leadership of the organized labour movement.

In both Canada and the United States, a number of post-secondary institutions offer labour programmes. In the US there are 51 universities or colleges, in 30 states, which list programmes.<sup>7</sup> In addition, there is a national organization of

<sup>3</sup>The essential objective of all trade union training efforts should be to increase trade union effectiveness. Training directed at reinforcing the essential democratic structures of trade unions — encouraging active membership participation in and commitment to trade union activities; and buttressing trade union autonomy and self-reliance is best suited to assisting the sound development of strong independent unions. This means that education must strengthen the autonomous self-governing nature of workers' organizations and encourage the promotion of the necessary skills and techniques required to defend the independence of trade unions, free from external influences." International Congress of Free Trade Unions statement on Education and Training, 14th World Conference, 1988.

<sup>4</sup>Richard Freeman, "What Does the Future Hold for U.S. Unions," *Industrial Relations*, 44, 1 (1989).

<sup>5</sup>Noah Meltz, "Unionism in the Private Service Sector: A Canada U.S. Comparison," paper for Conference on North American Labour Movements into the 1990s: Similarities or Differences", Centre for International Affairs, Harvard University, 3-5 February 1989.

<sup>6</sup>Brian Towers, "Labor Education in Depression: A British Perspective," *Labor Studies Journal*, 12 (Spring 1987); Richard E. Swyer, *Labor Education in the U.S.: An Annotated Bibliography* (Metuchen, N.J. 1977); Michael D. Parsons, "Labor Studies in Decline," *Labor Studies Journal*, 15 (Spring 1990).

<sup>7</sup>University and College Labor Education Association, *Membership and Resource Directory of Institutions and Professional Staff 1989-90* (Cincinnati 1989).

labour educators, the University and College Labor Education Association (UCLEA), with a professional council of approximately 250 members, most of whom are engaged full-time in labour education at post-secondary institutions. While there is no Canadian equivalent to the UCLEA, there are 13 post-secondary institutions in seven provinces with labour programmes.<sup>8</sup>

Harvard and Simon Fraser University may seem an oddly matched pair for a discussion on labour programmes. Yet, despite considerable differences between the two institutions and between labour in both countries, the success of these programmes is attributable to similar approaches in forging a partnership with labour. It is also important to note, that the programmes at the two institutions are very different in character, reflecting the needs and interests of both the university community and the labour movement in each region.

Both the Harvard TUP and the Simon Fraser Labour Program were started by labour initially approaching the respective universities. In Harvard's case, Robert Watt, International Representative of the national craft-union central, the American Federation of Labor, approached Harvard Professor Sumner H. Slichter in the early 1940s and asked that Harvard develop a union programme to provide administrative training and leadership for trade union staff and officers.<sup>9</sup> At Simon Fraser University, Art Kube, Western Regional Director of Education for the Canadian Labour Congress, approached Dr. Jack Blaney, SFU Dean of Continuing Studies, in 1975, for help in developing a retirement programme for unionists.<sup>10</sup>

The fact that in both of these partnerships labour initiated the contact placed these collaborations on a cooperative footing from the start. With the unions taking the initiative, the programmes were aimed at complementing and augmenting labour's own educational programmes. Both universities began with proven programme models. At Simon Fraser, an experienced programme director responsible for the Senior Citizens' Program was assigned to coordinate a joint university/labour-sponsored conference on "Pre-Retirement Planning."<sup>11</sup> At Harvard, a nine-month residential "executive programme" for trade unionists, modelled after the recently-developed "advanced management programme," was offered for the first time in the 1942-43 school year.<sup>12</sup> From the beginning, the Harvard programme

<sup>8</sup>British Columbia: Simon Fraser University and Capilano College; Alberta: Athabasca University; Saskatchewan: University of Saskatchewan; Manitoba: University of Manitoba; Ontario: Algonquin College, Brock University, George Brown University, McMaster University and Niagara College; Quebec: McGill University and UQUAM; Nova Scotia: St. Francis Xavier University.

<sup>9</sup>Harvard Business School, Office of Public Information, "Training in Labor Leadership at Harvard," (c1960) Harvard University Archives, Trade Union Program Files, 1199.

<sup>10</sup>Elaine Bernard, "SFU Labour Program Discussion Paper," (August 1983) Continuing Studies, Labour Program, SFU.

<sup>11</sup>Bernard, "SFU Labour Program," 2.

<sup>12</sup>"Training in Labor Leadership." Today, a variety of residential executive programs are offered by Harvard in business, government, and labour. Using case method, and taught by

was conceived by both labour and the university as national, indeed, international in scope.<sup>13</sup>

At Simon Fraser, the success of the first conference led labour to seek to involve the university's Continuing Studies Office in assisting with subsequent conferences. This resulted in a series of colloquia on various issues of interest to labour co-sponsored by SFU, the British Columbia Federation of Labour (the provincial labour federation), and the CLC Regional Office. This collaboration often involved assisting labour in identifying faculty and resources in the university community which labour could work with on issues or problems beyond the individual conferences or campaigns.

The Simon Fraser University collaboration was in many ways more challenging than the executive programme forged between Harvard and the AFL. In 1975, when the SFU programme began, labour in Canada already had a national summer residential school for labour leaders, Labour College, so the BC Federation of Labour was interested in more short-term programmes, complementing their own campaigns and interests. The partnership grew beyond individual public policy conferences to include joint university/labour research projects,<sup>14</sup> such as the publication of a collectively written social history of the city of Vancouver on its centennial, *Working Lives: Vancouver 1886-1986*.<sup>15</sup> In addition, the programme included a twice annual "Weekend Labour School"<sup>16</sup> held at SFU Burnaby Campus.

The Harvard TUP went through a number of changes since its start in 1942. In response to labours' difficulty in releasing key personnel for a full academic year of study, the TUP was shortened from 9 months to 13 weeks to its present 10 weeks. In recent years, the TUP has moved from its initial home in the Business School to its current position as a university-wide programme reporting to the President's Office. In response to the new challenges facing labour, the curriculum has been changed to focus on analyzing the economic environment and strategic planning for trade unionists.

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Harvard faculty, these programs are designed to equip participants with the skills and practical tools essential for management and leadership in their respective fields, and to provide a unique opportunity to explore key issues in a rich academic and cultural environment.

<sup>13</sup>The American Federation of Labor consisted of a majority of "international" unions which included members and locals in both Canada and the United States.

<sup>14</sup>Most of the grants came from Labour Canada or the Social Science and Humanities Research Council. They included research on quality of worklife programs and technological change. From 1983 and 1989, SFU Labour Programs directly participated in research projects with grants totaling \$510,415.

<sup>15</sup>Working Lives Collective, *Working Lives: Vancouver 1886-1986* (Vancouver 1986).

<sup>16</sup>These schools are held under the auspices of the Vancouver/New Westminster and District Labour Councils with approximately 200-300 participants in attendance per school. Fifteen to twenty separate classes are taught on topics varying from "technological change" to "grievance handling."

At both Harvard and SFU, and with the respective labour bodies, the group responsible for deciding appropriateness of programme offerings are appointed advisory committees. An important aspect of the programme director's job at both Harvard and Simon Fraser is liaising between the university and labour advisory committees. While it might seem more practical simply to have a joint committee, with both university and labour advisors meetings together, both university programmes have come to recognize that the institutional cultures of labour and the university make it more efficient for separate advisory committees.<sup>17</sup>

The assumption should not be made that because the advisory committees meet separately that there is little collaboration between faculty on the advisory committee and labour advisory committee members. A strength of the Harvard TUP, in particular, is the involvement of advisory committee members from both faculty and labour in teaching in the programme. In the 1990 session, for example, all of the faculty advisory committee taught at least one session in the TUP, with six of the seven members of the advisory committee holding major teaching responsibilities in the programme.<sup>18</sup> From the labour advisory committee, two of the seven labour advisors did some teaching in the 1990 session.

In addition to the faculty advisory committee there is extensive faculty involvement in the Harvard TUP. In the 1990 session, for example, 21 Harvard faculty taught at least one session in the programme. For labour, the extensive involvement of senior Harvard faculty in the TUP has won this programme the reputation as the "graduate school of the U.S. labour movement."<sup>19</sup>

As university regulations prohibit the provision of additional remuneration to Harvard faculty for teaching in Harvard sponsored programmes, and in most

<sup>17</sup>At Harvard, the faculty advisory committee is appointed by the President and consists of the TUP executive director and interested tenured faculty from various schools and departments at Harvard, plus a faculty member from the Sloan School of Management at Massachusetts Institute of Management. At Simon Fraser University, the faculty advisory committee is appointed by the Dean of Continuing Studies and ratified by the University Senate Committee on Continuing Studies. It also consists of the program director and interested tenured faculty from various departments.

The labour advisory committee for the Harvard program is appointed by the President of the AFL/CIO from interested officers on the executive council. It currently consists of seven officers including the presidents of some of the major unions in the US, including the Steelworkers, the Service Employees Union, United Food and Commercial Workers, and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees. The labour advisory committee for the Simon Fraser University program is the Education Committee of the BC Federation of Labour, which is appointed by the executive council of the BC Fed.

<sup>18</sup>Four of the seven core courses were taught by advisory committee members. In addition, two advisory committee members took responsibilities for teaching multi-session courses varying in length from three to six sessions.

<sup>19</sup>Thomas Donahue, Secretary-Treasurer, AFL/CIO, Commencement Speech, Harvard Trade Union Program Graduation, 22 March 1990.

instances department teaching credit is not given for such teaching,<sup>20</sup> the programme has been challenged to provide creative methods for rewarding faculty involvement. Most faculty agree that the most significant reward is the teaching opportunity with this unique group of participants.<sup>21</sup> For academics interested in labour, this is an opportunity to work with experienced labour leaders. The TUP limits enrollment to 30 participants a year. Participants are all senior full-time staff and/or officers with unions in the US, Canada, Australia, and Europe. Alumni of the programme can be found in senior labour and government positions in many countries around the world.

In addition to stimulating exchanges with participants, senior leaders from labour, business, and government are brought in for special sessions during the programme. Faculty teaching in the programme are invited to informal lunches or dinners with a small group of participants and guests. These informal occasions have been quite popular with the faculty and participants.

The Simon Fraser University Labour Program without the structural focus of a yearly ten-week session has brought cohesion to this programme through a thematic focus. Much of the collaboration over the last six years has been on research-based programing in work and technology. The strategy of giving a thematic focus to a labour programme provides a unity to programing which may lack structural integration. This method has proven a successful strategy in other university-based, non-credit labour programmes in Canada, such as both the University of Saskatchewan and UQUAM whose programmes emphasize occupational health and safety.

Similar to the Harvard TUP, though, faculty involvement in the SFU programme has been essential for both labour and university support for the programme. Faculty involvement has for the most part been on a project-to-project basis. But many of these projects have been a year or longer in duration. In addition to SFU faculty, projects of the Labour Program, such as the "Working Lives Collective," have provided a vehicle for faculty to work with labour, community activists, and faculty in other universities.

A unique feature of the SFU Labour Program has been the involvement of graduate students in many projects, with the programme providing salaries and stipends for students. Projects involving students span from a summer job for a history student's researching of the history of the Vancouver Labour Council to questionnaire design, administration, and analysis for opinion research.

<sup>20</sup>There are some exceptions. Two courses which make up the TUP curriculum are jointly taught for credit with the Graduate School of Business Administration and the Graduation School of Education. In addition, some departmental time release credit is offered for the faculty coordinator of the university-wide public forum called "the Collective Bargaining Seminar" which is offered in conjunction with the TUP.

<sup>21</sup>As one example, here is a comment from MIT Institute Professor Noam Chomsky, in reference to teaching in the TUP. "It's so much more pleasant and gratifying than the usual academic crowd..." Letter to author, 2 April 1990.

Both the SFU and Harvard programmes have been successful, not simply in the number of faculty involved but in the diversity of disciplines which they have tapped. At Harvard, this has meant moving the programme beyond an industrial relations and public policy focus into a wider exploration of the world of work. At SFU, this has developed into collaborations between labour and scholars working in such diverse fields as history, women's studies, marketing, engineering science, computing science, sociology, communications, kinesiology, and political science.

For the labour movement, the partnership with post-secondary institutions has a variety of rewards. University-based union programmes can provide advance progression complementing labour's own internal educational programmes. In addition, labour programmes open the doors of university research and resources to labour. The SFU labour programme has played a unique role in BC in assisting unions in designing and conducting participatory research primarily in the area of work and technology. The SFU programme even has helped unions find funding to release union members from their jobs for extended periods of time to engage in these cooperative research projects.

The Harvard TUP, as the "graduate school of the U.S. labour movement," is widely recognized as providing a unique educational experience. Case method, a keystone to much of Harvard's teaching in professional schools, has widely adopted as a very appropriate teaching method for unionists. Labour's own education centre in the US, the George Meany Center, has also adopted this method of teaching for many of its programmes.

Labour has found that a programme specifically designed to meet the needs of "senior leadership" is a necessity in the 1990s. In the words of United Mineworkers' President Richard Trumka, "I have sent our staff to the (Harvard) Program because the people we deal with have expertise in areas that unions traditionally don't...I believe that union leaders need to be as well-educated as their corporate and political counterparts."

While labour would reject the notion that the university represents an "objective" or "unbiased" educational environment, university based labour programmes can provide a multi-union educational experience not always available in labour's own programmes. As well, sessions or courses which include exchanges between unionists and students in other university programmes promote tremendous mutual learning. "Taking a class with Harvard Business School students was one of the most enlightening educational experiences I've had as a trade unionist," states Donald State, District Representative and Auditor of the International Union of Operating Engineers. "It taught me a great deal about negotiating and I find that I now have a much better understanding of my dealings with employers."

Celia Wcislo, President of Service Employees International Union Local 285, stated that "until I attended the (Harvard) programme, I thought that education meant learning the right and wrong answer...what the Trade Union Program really taught me was how to think."

While few university educators would dispute the value of university-based education for labour, the pedagogic contribution of unionists to the university can sometimes be forgotten. For the university community, labour programmes can help promote critical thinking by bringing a workplace perspective into the classroom or research. At SFU, access to labour views and perspectives in a number of programmes has been enhanced through the labour programme. Public policy and social impact courses in a number of departments and faculties have incorporated material and resources generated in cooperation with the Labour Program.

At Harvard, the TUP jointly sponsors with the Graduate School of Business a final semester MBA course on "Employee Relations Strategy" which provides a "rare situation in which future leaders of both management and labour meet to learn together in the classroom."<sup>22</sup> In addition, the Collective Bargaining Seminar, a university wide form held in conjunction with the TUP, is the only regularly scheduled forum on campus aimed at bringing in speakers from local, national, and international unions, representatives from the media, political parties, and the business community to engage in wide ranging discussion and debate on issues of importance in the world of work.

In the case of both the Harvard TUP and the SFU Labour Program, a key to their success is an underlying premise that labour has much to contribute to the university community, not just as learners but also as teachers. Organized labour brings an important diversity often missing from our universities. Beyond specific programming, labour programmes provide a liaison between their respective university communities and organized labour.

Labour programmes are not without their troubling challenges. They can easily fall victim in a cross fire between organized labour as the legal representative of workers' interests and the university as an employers. More than one labour programme has been caught in the fray of a campus organizing drive or support staff strike.

In the real world of labour programmes, the separation of "church and state" is sometimes very difficult to maintain. Respect for labour traditions and norms is an important component of a partnership. For labour, a trade union programme cannot be seen to "flaunt" labour principles or norms. This does not mean, for example, that labour insists on imposing restriction on what is taught, but it does mean, for example, that materials and services used in a labour programme must be produced by union labour and display the appropriate label.

The experience of the Harvard Trade Union Program and the Simon Fraser University Labour Program demonstrates that while a partnership with labour can be a challenging link for post-secondary institutions, the rewards of such collaboration can be mutually beneficial.

<sup>22</sup>Janice McCormick and Maury Peiperl, "Breaking the Impasse: Trade Unionists and MBAs in the Classroom," (Boston 1989), 2.

and often untested experience (much as I am doing in this paper). If challenged by an intellectual, they suggest that academics live in ivory towers and know little about the "real world." The problem, of course, is that they are right. Too often we labour historians know too little about the real world of unions.

Let me shift ground for a moment and try to approach this question from a different perspective.

In 1988, I was sent by my Faculty Association at the University of Ottawa to a collective bargaining conference organized by the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA). At one session on "How to construct a negotiating team," everyone agreed that negotiating teams should include academics whose scholarly research provides useful expertise on the collective bargaining process. Much to my surprise, it was suggested that labour historians would be well-qualified members of the negotiation teams. Certainly such attitudes explain my own nomination to the 1987 negotiating team at the University of Ottawa. The fact that I was a labour historian helped ensure support for my appointment.

Clearly, if my own experience can be a guide, faculty associations do not know what many trade unionists know: labour historians know little about the real world of collective bargaining. I was aware of my own weaknesses in this area, but I would shortly become appalled at just how ill-prepared I was for the task I had taken on. My experience as a labour historian had provided at best minimal usable expertise for the task of collective bargaining. I learned on the job and have had to work harder than I would have liked at learning the job of trade unionist better. This experience also has rekindled my interest in labour history, and in many subtle ways made me a better teacher of labour history. It certainly had an impact on my relations with students at Labour College.

I have always had a good rapport with students at Labour College, but those relations improved in 1987. During the term I cancelled one class because of an all-night bargaining session. From that moment on I ceased to be simply an egg-head in their eyes. I became, for the first time, "Brother Piva": I had joined a subculture. When the occasion warrants, I now pepper lectures with personal anecdotes drawn from my trade union experience, to good effect. In a labour history course at Labour College, contentious issues invariably arise which need serious and rigorous debate. Being "Brother Piva" often makes it a little easier to promote rigorous debate yet avoid confrontation. The result is an even keener critical response to material presented either by me or in the students' numerous interjections.

But this is not the most important way in which participation in trade union activities has made me a better teacher of labour history. The most obvious change in my approach is not in my Labour College course, but in courses at the University of Ottawa. Material on the 19th century is now pared to free time for a discussion during the final weeks on the structure and evaluation of the collective bargaining process, particularly regarding questions about the labour codes (certification,



## Labour Historians and Unions: Assessing the Interaction

Michael J. Piva

WHEN THE IDEA FOR THIS CONFERENCE surfaced last year, the suggestion was that social as well as intellectual interaction among members of the labour history community could better be promoted with presentations which would be less formal than those presented at the Canadian Historical Association (CHA). My comments are, as a result, highly personal and based upon interactions with unionists in a very specific arena: the labour history course at the Labour College of Canada.

To attend the Labour College, students must be sponsored by a Congress affiliate; they tend to be local activists. These militants arrive at Labour College with what I believe are fairly typical attitudes about the academy, held by both the rank and file and the leadership of the movement. Although some of these attitudes are less-overtly manifested now than in the 1970s, there are a number of constants. Each session opens with the students spellbound and showing extraordinary deference toward their teachers. We "professors," after all, have all that education; they, on the other hand, frequently feel their own lack of formal education acutely. It does not take long, however, for the atmosphere to improve dramatically. Deference goes by the board as soon as one makes a generalization about which someone in the class has a different opinion based upon their trade union experience. When this happens the "professor" is immediately stopped, often in mid-sentence, and challenged.

The most dramatic case of this came in 1976 and 1977 during the struggle over wage and price controls. The suggestion that during World War II controls had worked reasonably well and that real incomes increased during the control period brought instant challenges. Clearly here was another example of intellectual hocus-pocus designed to undermine the labour movement's position that such policies lead inevitably to disaster for working people. The episode highlighted what I believe is a general attitude among unionists.

Most activists recognize that scholarly training and research can provide valuable weapons in labour/management battles. Many, although by no means all, recognize that "academic" training has a legitimate and important place in labour education programmes. At the same time, there exists a current of anti-intellectualism within the labour movement as well as a basic distrust of outsiders. Such attitudes seem rooted in a belief that personal experience is by far the best teacher and that book learning can never substitute for the shop floor. Labour people will often cling with extraordinary tenacity to conclusions drawn from limited anecdotal

mediation, conciliation, etc.) and arbitration. Much of this material is of the kind more typically found in industrial relations courses, yet students respond very favorably. At the University of Ottawa, many see themselves as destined for the public service and public sector unions. For these students, issues like the historical evolution of arbitration in labour/management relations are seen to be immediately relevant.

More importantly, experience as a trade unionist reminds me of many things which I already "knew," but sometimes neglect, while teaching labour history. These most frequently involve a greater sensitivity to those issues which lead inevitably to compromises and difficulties between labour leaders and their rank and file members. Labour College provides innumerable illustrations of such dilemmas.

Students at Labour College come from the shop floor; it is rare indeed to find a staff person in attendance. Although many are ambitious and know they are destined for executive or staff positions with their locals and their national unions, they nonetheless remain, for the time being, men and women of the shop floor. Each year at Labour College, I am reminded again how little regard is given to union reps by rank and filers. These shopfloor militants frequently talk about reps in exactly the same terms they reserve for intellectual egg-heads. Reps are too frequently described as being out of touch with the reality of the shop floor. Never has a session gone by when I am not regaled with some exaggerated story told by a militant shop steward about how they had shut down the line over this or that problem. Reps, the class always agrees, know little about real life; the steward, all agree again, can handle problems more efficiently than reps. It never ceases to amaze me how often one hears at Labour College arguments against, for example, the Rand Formula for driving a wedge between reps and the rank and file. I have even heard arguments at Labour College against the system of compulsory collective bargaining because it restricts unreasonably the inalienable right to conduct instant wildcat strikes.

Such stories invariably touch on very real issues. The view of the institution always differs in some way from the view of the shop floor. It will always be difficult to balance the interests of the union as a whole with the interests of the myriad locals. Being an activist necessarily involves confronting and dealing with such dilemmas. The experience makes one far more sensitive to such problems as they arise in a labour history course. Experience conducting grievances, negotiating a collective agreement, or going through arbitration will not give you the tools necessary to teach in the classroom, but I have found it does sensitize one to the subtleties involved in the process. Trade union experience is no substitute for cognitive knowledge and rigorous analysis, but it can greatly improve the quality of the classroom presentation.

The question, then, is why labour historians are not more active trade unionists. I know some of the academics here have been involved in trade union activities at their places of employment, yet my untested impression is that the number is

surprisingly small. I have found that getting involved is incredibly easy — simply announce you are a labour historian and you likely will be greeted with open arms, on the sometimes-mistaken assumption that you have valuable expertise to lend to the enterprise. If this proves not to be the case, you can learn on the job. As labour historians, we should know the importance of our own unions. My experience convinces me that, although active participation is guaranteed to increase your frustration level, it likely will lead to some improvements (albeit minor) in your working conditions, and is likely to make you a better teacher of labour history.

## The New Brunswick Experience

Raymond Leger

IN THE PAST TEN YEARS, there has been a considerable increase in research and publications and in general a great improvement in the field of labour history. One has only to look at *Labour/Le Travail* to see the enormous amount of work that has been done. In my view, most of that work is good and useful. But a very important problem remains. All that research, all of those publications, all of that work is not accessible to the working people of this country.

But why do we have this problem? Why does working-class history not reach the working class? In my opinion there are two main reasons. First, it comes from the universities. Labour historians are trained in universities where they are isolated from the rest of the world. Although most labour historians are trained (I hope) in an environment that is generally sympathetic to the aspirations and aims of the working class, the fact that labour history should be for the working men and women of this country is not stressed enough. Also many people who get degrees at the graduate level in labour history will eventually work in a university. There, they will quite often teach or do research and their main clientele will not be working people, but students from different backgrounds in society. Clearly, there is not sufficient conscious effort on the part of labour historians to reach out to working people.

Secondly, I would say that the labour movement in general has not used labour history as an education tool as it should have. We have to realize that education is not yet the priority it should be for a lot of unions. Unions and central labour bodies that have systematic education programmes very seldom include labour history in their curriculum. The exception to this general rule is the course in labour history at the Labour College of Canada, but this is very limited and only touches a few union people once a year. I also think that people in the labour movement are not

aware of what has been done by labour historians. This ignorance, plus the fact that many people in the labour movement are still reluctant to work with intellectuals, stops them from trying to collaborate with labour historians.

Although all the above is unfortunately only too true in most instances, it is possible to get labour historians and unions to collaborate and work together. In New Brunswick only the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton (UNB) has a labour historian that specializes in Canadian labour history, Professor David Frank. So the title of my presentation could have been the interaction of David Frank with the labour movement in New Brunswick. Seriously, in the last five years we have made some progress. First, the UNB history department in Fredericton published *The New Brunswick Worker*, which is a guide to the published material on 20th-century New Brunswick labour history. This publication was distributed free to unions and labour councils in the province. Last year our union, the Retail Wholesale and Department Store Union, organized a series of workshops on labour history. In fall 1989 the Canadian Labour Congress included labour history in its week-long school residential programme for the first time. Equally important, for the last two summers, the New Brunswick Federation of Labour has helped to fund a student's research on the province's labour history.

The most interesting event to take place was the New Brunswick Labour History Workshop on 29-30 April and 1 May 1990 in Fredericton. Organized by the New Brunswick Federation of Labour Education Committee with financial help from the Canadian Labour Congress and co-sponsored by the UNB history department in Fredericton, it was an excellent example of positive interaction between unions and labour historians. On the programme we had labour historians like Robert Babcock (University of Maine), David Frank, Bill Gillespie (author of *A Class Act: An Illustrated History of the Labour Movement in Newfoundland and Labrador*), Sue Calhoun (author of a book to be published on the history of the Maritime Fishermen's Union), and graduate students with interests in Labour History like Carol Ferguson (Queen's), Nicole Lang (Université de Montréal), Bill Parenteau (UNB), and Janice Cook (UNB). Those people were mixed on panels with veterans of the labour movement in New Brunswick such as John "Lofty" Macmillan (retired CUPE), Harold Stafford (retired CLC), Tim McCarthy (NBFL), and Ed Quinn (retired, United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America). A session was held on Archives with Fred Farrel of the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick. Local unions from across the province attended. For the most part this was the participants' first direct exposure to scholarly work. Thus this first-hand experience was conducted in a manner to insure that participants did not have to read long articles or books. Instead, they could discuss and exchange with all the resource people for three days. It ended up in lively exchange and sharing of information between intellectuals and working people. The feedback we received from all participants and panelists was overwhelmingly positive.

In closing, I would say the New Brunswick experience shows that it is possible for labour historians to reach out to working people if a sincere effort is made on

both parts to do so. More and more, I feel that there is an opening on the part of the labour movement for collaboration with other progressive forces in society. Labour historians have to make a special effort to be part of this important process.

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