

# H.C. Pentland and Continuing Education at the University of Manitoba: Teaching Labour History to Trade Unionists

Gerald Friesen

HISTORY TEACHERS in Canadian universities spend very little time at professional meetings discussing the *design* of their courses. This is true of most disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. Scholars in these subjects rarely investigate formally why one course seems to have considerable impact upon students and another does not. Nor do they debate the long-term contributions of various types of course and program to a student's development. At the University of Manitoba, where numerous workshops consider techniques of teaching, the *content* and *scope* of the courses are rarely addressed. The conventional approach to course design stems from a discipline-centred concern to explain a "field" rather than from an attempt to fulfill some other definition of a student's needs. Is this appropriate?

In order to consider this question, I have organized this paper around three subjects: the first concerns the Manitoba Federation of Labour-University of Manitoba certificate program and the students who participate in it; the second reports on some interviews I conducted with several graduates as a means of assessing the program and its distinctive labour history course designed by the late Clare Pentland; third, in view of the striking response of the students to my questions, I would like to comment on the content and purpose of such a labour history course within the broader context of continuing education and Canadian labour history.<sup>1</sup>

The Manitoba Federation of Labour — University of Manitoba Three-Year Certificate Program is now 30 years old. Each year, a diverse group of about twelve new students commences its studies, one three-hour session per week at Winnipeg's Union Centre, two classes per year, three years to completion, with the

<sup>1</sup>The context for these comments is provided by Elaine Bernard "Labour Programmes: A Challenging Partnership," *Labour/Le Travail*, 27 (Spring 1991), 199-207.

assurance of unallocated course credit (6 or 12 credit hours) in a BA degree program at the University of Manitoba upon completion.

The student body is always diverse. Of the 36 students in one class, for example, no single union accounted for more than four. Attrition rates were high, though they have improved in recent years. No one who perseveres fails. In my 1978-79 class, which provides most of the evidence for the discussion that follows, a half-dozen students had university degrees and a dozen had not completed high school. The rest, half the total, had graduated from Grade 12. None had any real knowledge of labour history and most had only a smattering of formal study in economics, government, law, and industrial relations before they entered the program. No one who has taught adult classes needs to be told that a student group of this sort will contain individuals with great intelligence, wide experience, sharp observation, and shrewd judgment; it will also contain students who have had little practice in conceptualizing their experience in discipline-sanctioned language, little skill in writing and, often, little practice in reading.

I recently interviewed six of the 1978-79 group to find out a little more about their experience in the program. These six individuals and, I think, most of the others in the class, had been active in the union movement, whether as members of local executives or as employees of a union. Most, but not all, came from blue-collar family backgrounds. They did not take the course to increase their chances of promotion within the union civil service or to win election to higher executive position. Rather, they sought to "improve themselves" — that is, to understand a little more about their society and their place within it.

The six I interviewed were adamant about their motivation. Several described their decision to enroll as a typical product of Winnipeg winters — "get out and agitate or stay in and vegetate," said one. Many have taken numerous other courses. The machinist later convinced me to join him and his wife in a dance course, which he took between photography, Grades 9 and 12 English, Grade 12 Biology and Grade 11 Chemistry, two Art courses and numerous union workshops. A union representative who started out with a B.Sc. in Math and Physics is now taking a ten-course international program on Employee Benefits packages to improve his grasp of a rapidly-changing field. The hotel employee retired, then completed a BA and an MA. Another union rep later attended the CLC College in Ottawa, which she declared to be inferior to the Manitoba program.

The few individuals in the class who already held university degrees, two of my six interviewees, had no fears about the challenge of the Certificate Program but the others, whether they possessed a 30 year-old Grade 12 certificate or an incomplete Grade 10, trembled at the prospect of a "university course" and a "university professor." They also bristled at their own sense of inadequacy. In private if not in public, partly because of this feeling of insecurity, but also because of their own firm and different perspective, they challenged the book-learning and the presumptions of their professors.

One of the Grade 12 graduates, who later told me she earned her high school diploma with a 90 per cent average, said she had wanted to go to university in the 1930s but could not afford the luxury, so she went out to work. Going to the campus 40 years later was intimidating. Learning how to write an essay was a great challenge but she had anticipated that dealing with the professors would be her biggest problem: "they won't understand us, they come from another world from us working people, most of us don't even have high school, they [the professors] think differently." One of the highlights she recalls from her classes was the moment when a group of students challenged the Economics professor on a matter of substance and, she thought, won the debate. She was surprised to learn, she says, how much *we*, the students, knew and how relevant it was to the course material. It is noteworthy that she has done two further degrees in the intervening 15 years, but it is equally striking that, in retrospect, she believes her union certificate course was outstanding because "we weren't your typical bunch of students."

Every teacher has to learn that there is no such thing as a dumb or stupid question. One of these former students likes to think his way step by step, slowly and carefully, through the issues that confront him in his shop and union and political party. In 1977, he had asked his Economics professor what was "a fair profit." The professor laughed and dismissed the question. That economics course was difficult, the student says, and raised a lot of issues only to make them more confused. "I worked damned hard," he told me, "but the course cheesed me off." Though he spent extra time on his assignments, he never did receive adequate recognition in his marks and he remains unhappy, 15 years later, with the course and the teacher, and especially with the dismissal of the question about fair profit.

What did the students get from the certificate program and from the labour history course specifically? I asked this question without embroidery in the hope that the answers would not be unduly compromised but I admit that I expected very little in the way of recollection or enthusiasm. The answers were a revelation to me. The clearest response came from the prize-winner in 1979, a university degree-holder (Psychology and Sociology major), an activist and a follower of women's issues, who was then working in a low-paid job as a day-care worker and who later joined the union staff, where she is now a specialist in pay equity and women's equal opportunity programs. She enrolled because her union rep had encouraged her. Looking back with the perspective acquired during 15 years of union work, she says that the Labour History course stands out in her memory because it was her first exposure to the study of ordinary workers, her introduction to the idea that a union was a movement as well as a service; it provided her with a satisfying explanation for her own social activism. She said that she found the sense of historic context "inspiring." She had been struck by the sacrifices made by individuals in generations past. And she said that she had enjoyed the reading assigned in the class and seriously considered becoming a labour historian.

One of her classmates echoed this emphasis on the union context by saying that, aside from a favourite essay on the Oshawa strike, what she most remembered

from the labour history class was that people actually risked death, and died, in standing up for their beliefs. She cited Cape Breton, the Winnipeg Strike, Pullman, and Peterloo in support, and said that she has actually contemplated the degree of commitment shown by earlier generations of union leaders as she has gone to work in the intervening years.

The most detached of my interviewees (or so I guessed) was a long-time union employee. He, too, commented on the perspective he had acquired: "The course and the program didn't change my life — but it was a valuable experience — any education is good — but it gave me a better sense of this *kind* of work — this was a job at first, not a role — it gave me a better understanding of the movement — and since, not at the time but in the following ten years, it strengthened my commitment...." Everyone of the students thought all unionists should take the course. All had nostrums for increasing enrollment. They argued that it should go on the road because unionists in rural Manitoba don't understand their role and don't find support for their perspective. They said that the Manitoba Federation of Labour (MFL) should promote the program more aggressively. And so on. These people left the course, and remain today, convinced of its benefits.

What can be gathered from the students' enthusiasm and quite heartening support for their labour history course? Most obvious, perhaps, is their sense of the fitness, the relevance, the value of the material to their lives. Their recollection of other courses in the Certificate program differed substantially. They described the course in labour law as helpful because it covered the statutes and the business of researching case law and how to prepare a brief for an arbitration hearing. The course was useful and interesting, and the teacher, a well-known lawyer and former politician, was very good, but the students' comments remained at the level of tools. They learned techniques, the context of lawmaking and the evolution of the specific statutes with which as service representatives they would deal daily. Recollection of the class evoked no statements about its contribution to their understanding of the structure of society or how they saw themselves in their work or in life. The course on Canadian government, similarly, was described at best as useful — a means of understanding federal-provincial-municipal levels of power, the structure of the civil service, the legislative and lobbying process. The Industrial Relations course seemed too bookish, at least in the years that these people took it, to have much relevance; its focus on organizational theory did not win many plaudits. Economics, presented in a leftish, political-economy approach, was described as interesting by some, boring or badly taught by others; the responses seemed to vary with the teacher and the student but left me with no clear pattern.

The students' response to labour history simply differed so markedly from their responses to the other courses that it seemed to be on a different plane in their memory. Why? The obvious answer is that their former teacher was also their present interviewer. Of course, this is true — the students were polite, friendly, and did not want to wound. A second answer is that this might have been one of those remarkable classes when the mix simply worked — when the right combination of

students, the right year for the right teacher, produced a memorable educational experience. A third explanation, really just a variation on the second, emphasizes the local context. The course coincided with some heated labour and political debates and an intensely-politicized period in Manitoba society. A social democratic and "labourist" government had just been defeated by the Thatcherite Conservative, Sterling Lyon, and a stormy strike at a steel products plant had divided the local union movement and embarrassed the former NDP administration. My partner in the second part of the program in 1978-79, the Canadian Government class, was none other than the defeated Premier, Ed Schreyer. He left the program in mid-year to become Governor-General; before he left, and before his students and the Canadian public had learned of his appointment, he tested his theories concerning the Royal prerogative in classroom discussions. Some classes do benefit from accidents of timing.

As accidents that cannot be duplicated, none of these reasons would sustain a review of the labour history course. However, an equally convincing case can be made that three other factors — its design, its administration, and the relationship between the course content and the students' experience — played a part in its success.

The University of Manitoba-Manitoba Federation of Labour certificate program was devised in the early 1960s by union leaders, extension educators, and university professors. It arose in an era when, under Art Coulter and Bob Russell (from the unions), and Duff Roblin and Cam McLean (from the Conservative party), among others, a relatively amicable union-business-government relationship produced a Labour-Management Review Committee and encouraged bi- and tripartite sponsorship of upgrading and training initiatives. After a review of the quality of management in the province, for example, the Manitoba Economic Consultative Board (itself a creation of the labour movement, business groups and the Roblin government) concluded that local management "was not up to snuff and needed beefing up," in the words of Art Coulter, then a leader of the MFL.<sup>2</sup> This tripartite diagnosis led to joint government-business sponsorship of the Manitoba Institute of Management.

A national conference on labour-university educational links provided the impetus for Manitoba's certificate course. The conference delegates had declared that provinces should offer an "adequate programme of labour education" and Professor A.S. Tweedie of the University of Manitoba (Department of Extension and Adult Education) followed up that suggestion almost immediately. Tweedie called a meeting of several professors and two representatives of labour, Art Coulter and Harry Munro, in December 1961, to review the educational activities of the Manitoba Labour Institute and individual unions. The eight individuals present then decided that a "broad programme of liberal studies," including "substantial courses in industrial relations, inter-personal relations, psychology,

<sup>2</sup>Interview, May 1992.

political science, labour legislation, economics, philosophy [and] the history of the trade union movement" might be established by a university-labour group. The participants also specified that "the standard of study should be approximately that of the W.E.A. in Britain — a three year program calling in each subject for at least three hours per week of face to face contact with an instructor supplemented by reading and essays."<sup>3</sup>

The program was planned during the next few months. Its creators considered such questions as whether it should be offered exclusively to unionists (yes); whether to grant credits and degrees (no); whether it should be administered by the union movement or the university (both); whether it should be taught by university graduates, senior students, or faculty (the latter); and whether to impose entrance requirements (no, but applicants would be screened by means of an essay and an interview; this was later dropped). The organizing committee concluded almost immediately that, although it would not exclude people who sought to improve themselves as union members, "the main emphasis should be laid on preparing a programme for younger trade unionists who had received some training in union technical education but who now required a broader programme of general studies to fit them for positions of leadership." At a later meeting, the organizers explained that "our intention was not to make the business agent more effective in his job but rather to provide a perspective for labour leaders of their role in the total community."<sup>4</sup>

The joint University-Labour certificate program has been offered ever since. The certificate rewards completion of an integrated educational experience. This is not an occasional lecture series, or a group of unrelated courses, but a *program*. The labour history course was originally one of six half-courses (36 classroom hours each). It has since been united with a general Canadian history survey to become two half-courses. It was designed by the late Clare Pentland, a member of the Economics Department at the University of Manitoba, but it has a longer pedigree than might be suspected. To appreciate its strengths, we must recall the evolution of adult education and labour's association with the extension education movement.

The earliest university extension activities in the English language can be traced to lectures in Rochdale, England in the 1860s. They built on the foundations provided by Mechanics Institutes and Workingmen's Clubs. These lectures and courses became more formal after the foundation in 1899 of Ruskin College, an institution for working-class students at Oxford University, and after the launch of a Workers' Educational Association (WEA) in England in 1903. And these institutions inherited the work of the Webbs, Sydney and Beatrice, and the school for

<sup>3</sup>University of Manitoba Archives [UMA] UA23 CED, box 4 file 4, "University-Labour Course: Minutes," 11 December 1961. I would like to thank Denise Anderson for her extra labours in digging out these boxes.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.* 15 January 1962; 27 February 1962.

which they were the inspiration, the London School of Economics, which embarked upon its pioneer work in the field of labour history in 1895-96.<sup>5</sup>

The WEA was organized in Ontario in 1917 and functioned as an effective educational agency until the early 1950s. It aimed not to provide vocational education but to introduce "knowledge essential to intelligent and effective citizenship." According to a survey written in the 1930s, its goal was to enable workers "to think for themselves and to express their thoughts fluently and correctly." As a result, its program was organized in the format of a school rather than of an informal lecture club or literary society: "All WEA classes are strictly continuous-study groups. Where the membership is large enough, as in Toronto, the subjects are carried on in the first, second and third years." Thus, in the mid-1930s, the program offered economic anthropology ("other civilizations and economic systems") and modern economic history ("the history of our industrial system up to the present time"). Half of each two-hour evening session was reserved for lecture, half for discussion. Students must attend the first class *regularly* before entry into the second and third. The subjects were to be taught at a "university standard," by university staff, but admission would be based only on a literacy requirement, not on the high school diploma.<sup>6</sup>

The WEA held its first meeting in Manitoba in 1938 and seems to have flourished in the next few years. The attendance of the 22 students in Professor R.O. McFarlane's 1941-42 class, which met 15 times, was 77 per cent. During the war years, the Winnipeg group emphasized that it cooperated fully with the

<sup>5</sup>On extension education in England, an early survey is William H. Draper *University Extension: A Survey of Fifty Years 1873-1923* (Cambridge 1923); on the London School of Economics, E.H. Hunt "Labour History at LSE," *Bulletin* (Society for the Study of Labour History), 45(Autumn 1982), 11-4; also useful are James Stuart *Reminiscences* (London 1911) and S.J. Curtis *History of Education in Great Britain* (London 1968), 481ff; on the Canadian branch, the source is Ian Radforth and Joan Sangster, "'A Link Between Labour and Learning': The Workers Educational Association in Ontario, 1917-1951," *Labour/Le Travail*, 8/9 (Spring/Autumn 1981-82), 41-78; also Peter Sandiford *et al.*, *Adult Education in Canada: A Survey* (Toronto 1935); Rosabel Fast "The Impact of Sponsorship: The University of Manitoba's Rural Adult Education Program, 1936-1945," MEd thesis, University of Alberta, 1991; M.R. Welton "To Be and Build a Glorious World: The Educational Thought and Practice of Watson Thomson, 1899-1946," PhD dissertation, University of British Columbia, 1983; Frank Cassidy and Ronald Faris, eds., *Choosing Our Future: Adult Education and Public Policy in Canada* (Toronto 1987); M.R. Welton, ed., *Knowledge for the People: The Struggle of Adult Learning in English-Speaking Canada 1818-1973* (Toronto 1987); Ronald Faris, *The Passionate Educators: Voluntary Associations and the Struggle for Control of Adult Education Broadcasting in Canada 1919-1952* (Toronto 1975); Michael R. Welton, "Conflicting Visions, Divergent Strategies: Watson Thomson and the Cold War Politics of Adult Education in Saskatchewan, 1944-46," *Labour/Le Travail*, 18 (Autumn 1986), 111-38. I am indebted to Professor Reginald Edwards for his assistance with this material.

<sup>6</sup>Sandiford, *Adult Education*, chapter 4.

University of Manitoba, which supplied tutors and facilities for classes, and the provincial Department of Education. Its oft-repeated message seemed to be that it did not contemplate subversion: "The aim of the Association is to achieve an understanding of the vital issues which confront us today and to teach people how to think and not what to think...." The subjects selected for study by the WEA executive "in consultation with the university" were in no way "propaganda," WEA Chairman Andy Robertson emphasized in a radio talk in 1941.<sup>7</sup>

The records of this WEA branch are few and scattered but it seems to have given way to a "Manitoba Labour Institute" in the next few years and then to have shifted its attention to the training of shop stewards and similar practical matters. However, the Manitoba story also intersects with the history of the Ontario WEA in this postwar period. In 1948, Clare Pentland, a graduate of Brandon College (BA 1940) and the University of Oregon (MA, 1943) who was then studying for his doctorate in Economics at the University of Toronto, was approached by the Toronto branch of the WEA to offer a course in the financial and economic history of 20th-century Canada. Pentland had taught in several one-room Manitoba schools during the 1930s and had assisted in the organization of schools among the Canadian troops in Holland at the end of World War II. His experience provided him, one imagines, with a firm grasp of a variety of adult student perspectives.

Pentland's outline for the 1948 WEA course won the approval of the Toronto branch president, George Sangster, because it took a broad approach to its subject and included British, American, and Canadian material. As Sangster wrote to Pentland, the outline offered "a broad treatment [that] is more in line with the needs of this group....paint a large canvas, not strong in detail, but hoping to leave an image in the student's mind to stimulate his thinking and his desire for further self-study."<sup>8</sup> A year later, Pentland moved to the University of Manitoba where, in autumn 1950, he devised an extension course under the joint auspices of the Manitoba Labour Institute and the newly-established Extension Division of the University.<sup>9</sup> I believe that this course, established on the foundation Pentland had laid down in Toronto, and drawing upon nearly a century of adult extension and a half-century of British labour history and WEA experience, became the course that Pentland offered as part of the University-Labour certificate course in 1963-64.

Pentland's innovative scholarship has been discussed in several works.<sup>10</sup> The key to his career, as Greer, Phillips and Kealey note, is the breadth of his scholarly

<sup>7</sup>A.N. Robertson "The University and the Workers' Educational Association," script for radio talk on CKY, 20 October 1941, in Provincial Archives of Manitoba, RB Russell Papers, WEA File; also script for a nearly-identical talk by Stewart Gordon, 19 October 1942, in the same file.

<sup>8</sup>University of Manitoba Archives, Pentland Papers, Sangster to Pentland, 27 July 1948, and *Ibid.* undated 1948.

<sup>9</sup>Pentland Papers, C. Meredith Jones to Pentland, 21 June 1950.

<sup>10</sup>Allan Greer, "Wage Labour and the Transition to Capitalism: A Critique of Pentland," *Labour/Le Travail*, 15 (Spring 1985), 7-22; Gregory S. Kealey, "H.C. Pentland and Working



vision. Pentland contributed to the debate over the origins of the English industrial revolution, to the Canadian discussions of productivity, work process, technological change and industrial relations, to the social history of Canada in the 18th and 19th century, and to the discussion of western Canadian labour history in the 20th century. He also followed the debates in *American economic and labour history* and was familiar with European literature on worker-management relations. He managed all this while preparing studies on the local economy for the Manitoba government and while teaching both in the regular University of Manitoba sessions and in the extension program between 1949 and the mid-1970s.

Whatever the strengths and weaknesses of this scholarly writing, it is Pentland's skill in course design that is the subject here. First presented as a History of Trade Unionism, and since restructured as a History of Labour, Pentland's course represents, in my opinion, an exceptionally valuable combination of subjects. It contains a very broad sweep in time and space, extending from English to American to Canadian labour history, in proportions of 2:1:3. Moreover, it encompasses some of the grand themes in the history of the common people through the ages: feudalism, capitalism, common peoples' resistance, political action. Equally important, it links the story of working people to unions and politics through its focus on what Pentland preferred to call the "industrial relations system." In English history, Pentland insisted on covering the transition to capitalism, the industrial revolution, the rise of unions and the link between unions, political parties, and the emergence of a social welfare state. In the shorter American section, he emphasized the 19th-century race and labour-management problems in the United States, the AFL craft union tradition, Roosevelt's dramatic changes to the union environment in the 1930s, the restructuring of unions that came with the CIO, and the failure of a third-party political tradition.

In dealing with Canada, as is apparent in his posthumously-published *Labour and Capital in Canada 1650-1860*<sup>11</sup> and in his report on labour-management relations for the Privy Council Task Force in 1968, Pentland emphasized these same themes within the national context.<sup>12</sup> Feudal and slave systems of labour relations came first in his story, followed by the formation of a capitalist labour

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Class Studies," and Paul Phillips, "Clare Pentland and the Labour Process," and Paul Deprez, "Pentland's Scarcity of Labour and the Industrial Revolution," in *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory* 3,2 (Spring 1979); Paul Phillips, "Introduction," in Pentland, *Labour and Capital in Canada 1650-1860* (Toronto 1981), v-xliii; Donald Akenson offers a harsh, critical footnote on Pentland's approach to Irish-Canadian history in Upper Canada/Canada West: "Ontario: Whatever Happened to the Irish?" *Canadian Papers in Rural History*, 3 (1982), 222-5.

<sup>11</sup>Pentland, *Labour and Capital in Canada 1650-1860*, (Toronto 1981).

<sup>12</sup>H.C. Pentland, *A Study of the Changing Social, Economic, and Political Background of the Canadian System of Industrial Relations*, (draft study, Task Force on Labour Relations, Privy Council Office, Ottawa 1968).

market. He then turned to the evolution of unions in an industrial relations environment structured by both British and American traditions. Pentland described the era from 1939 to 1947, when union recognition, the check-off, and collective bargaining became part of Canadian life, as "A Great Leap Forward." The next two decades, 1948-67, which he labelled the era of "The Directionless State," encompassed much more conflict and less comprehension among Canadians of their industrial relations institutions than he thought should have been the case.

Pentland's teaching approach was evident from his essay and examination questions. He asked for essays on such questions as: "A labour party: in Britain, yes; in the United States, no; in Canada, maybe. Discuss." One exam asked students to compare Canada's One Big Union, the American Knights of Labour, and Britain's "General Union" movement of the 1830s or the British "New Unionism" of the 1890s. His course outlines always included at least one or two units on European and other international union experiences, and they always began and ended with "The labour problems of every society" and "The theory of comparative industrial relations systems." In short, the course integrated economics, politics, and law as well as industrial relations; it was international and comparative in the sense that it emphasized the actual variety of state/labour/management relationships; and it encompassed a broad sweep in historical time. This class represented the capstone of the certificate program for Manitoba's trade unionists because it provided a context for all the other principles and disciplines. Pentland's design set out the actual historical record that lay behind the theoretical discussions. By tying the classroom discussion to a lived reality, Pentland demonstrated that academic discourse derived from and clarified human experience.

Why was the labour history course so well received? One sensible explanation relies on the intellectual merit of Labour History itself. By this I mean not just that the course dealt with the common people and could command the attention of workingpeople for that reason, but that its scholarly approach, the very system of thought embodied in the lectures and exams and assignments, earned the students' respect. I believe that, in his design of this course, Clare Pentland had anticipated Eric Hobsbawm's call for not just social histories but histories that offered "a science of human society."<sup>13</sup> In designing a course for students whose background he knew well, and in a field he knew well, Pentland had made it possible for workers in Manitoba to understand their context and, thus, to consider whether and how to change it.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup>E.J. Hobsbawm, "From Social History to the History of Society," *Daedalus*, 100, 1 (Winter 1971), 20-45; and Eric J. Hobsbawm, "Karl Marx's Contribution to Historiography," *Diogenes*, 64 (Winter 1968), 37-56.

<sup>14</sup>Herbert Gutman, "Labor History and the 'Sartre Question'," *Humanities* 1,5 (September 1980) and Gus Tyler, "Educating the Proletariat: The University and the Labor Union," *Change*, 11,1 (February 1979) 32-7, 64 argue for this goal in American labour education.

The actual administration of the certificate program offers a second reason for its success. By this I mean that the students owned the class. Their organization put on the program, recruited the enrollees, paid for most of the tuition fees, and vetted the teachers. A senior member of the Manitoba Federation of Labour sat in on my lectures for most of the first year that I taught the labour history course without Pentland's supervision. In the next session, I assigned a recently-published book, Rick Salutin's *Kent Rowley The Organizer: A Canadian Union Life*,<sup>15</sup> thinking that it would be a pleasant and interesting topic for a review. My impolitic decision happened to create one of those situations that we point to when we describe the ill-fitting relationship between the "ivory tower" and "real life": in his long and dramatic career, Rowley had been fired by an international union, had led the struggle for Canadian "national" unions, and had earned the enmity of "international" union leaders in Canada, including the MFL representatives in the Labour Certificate course. The 1977 Griffin strike, the episode that had embarrassed the NDP provincial government in Manitoba, raised the very problems of national vs. international unions that Rowley's career addressed. And I had a little explaining to do before the course supervisors from the MFL Education Committee. (Interestingly, they listened to my defence and accepted the assignment.) Thus, no matter how nervous the students might have been at attending university (a matter since addressed by convening the course at the Union Centre), they did feel that the course belonged to them.

A third explanation for the success of the course lies in its intersection with the students' experience. At least, this is what I concluded from the interviews with my former students. This conclusion suggests that to focus on Labour History to the exclusion of the rest of the program is probably a mistake. As the WEA proved many years earlier, a sustained, integrated sequence of courses will have a powerful effect upon committed students. The demands of this heavy program, the variety of instructors and disciplinary approaches, and the workplace experience of the students worked together to reinforce the classroom message. The single strongest generalization I can make from my three years of teaching assignments during the 1970s is that the students multiplied the impact of the message many-fold. They knew the shop floor, the bargaining committee, the confining bonds of gender and race-based perspectives, the struggle to change picket laws and to win the support of political parties for legislative proposals.

This third factor, the students' preparation, helps to explain the immediacy of the students' recollections of the course and their insistence that it had contributed to their continuing outlook. Yes, they mentioned skills development, in the sense of essay writing and report presentations. Yes, they mentioned using facts and anecdotes in shopfloor or coffee room discussions. But they all insisted that the course contributed to their interest in political action, their motivation, their awareness of the reality of a worker's historic context, their sense that ordinary

<sup>15</sup>Toronto, 1980.

people survived and battled on, their belief in the role of conscious resistance — the phrases arose in so many different forms and yet they underscored the same theme. The sentiments were not feigned.

One obvious problem arose when I tried to explain this enthusiastic support for union history and the certificate course to a philosopher-clergyman friend. His critique raised the obvious parallels with the role of Church History in Divinity Schools, or the *Lives of the Saints* in certain seminaries or, indeed, the case studies in successful capitalism in the Harvard Business School. The analogy with religion was striking. Are labour historians the new catechists of Canadian workingpeople, offering a secular martyrology to apprentice missionaries? Does this explain the students' suggestion that the Labour History course should go on the road — that is, were they expressing a convert's zeal for further missionizing? Where does "adult education" end, propaganda begin, and religion take over in discussions such as this?

I prefer to argue that the program demonstrates the importance of integrating "study" with "work" and "life." The labour history course offered relevant observations on the workplace, the organization of labour-management relations, political action, and the relationship among these categories of experience. (In the intervening years, with the addition of gender and aboriginal issues, in particular, to the Manitoba course, this list would be a little more inclusive.) It captured the attention of the students because so little in their larger cultural or educational and work experience addressed the questions that seemed to them to be worthy of thought. The poverty of contemporary national political discussion, the failure of the media, and the absence of sustained analysis of industrial relations issues that takes account of workers' perspectives should dismay all Canadians; but I leave that large topic for another day. The course content stood up to scrutiny when the students put it to the test in their daily life. It offered a meaningful historical interpretation, however roughly sketched, which sorted daily sensations into patterns. It constituted an analysis of the world that, for this generation and group, made sense.

The Labour History course and the University-Labour certificate program in Manitoba deserve attention because they represent examples of successful educational enterprises. We don't do enough of this comparison of course design, in my experience, and we should be comparing *what* we include in as well as *how* we teach our undergraduate programs. Moreover, we should be swapping perspectives on how we educate the citizens of our communities in continuing education programs such as this University-Labour Certificate Course. I suggest that Labour History, taught in a format similar to that designed by Clare Pentland in a program run by the union movement for union members offers a teaching experience that is as memorable as any that a teacher might hope to have, and that, to a degree that

I had not appreciated, a number of students have integrated this educational experience into their daily lives.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup>I would like to thank Mrs. Harriet Pentland, Art Coulter, Buffy Burelle, Jean Duncan, Ray Erb, Joan Halowski, Al Mickey, Jim Mochoruk, and Maureen Morrison for their assistance.

## **Social Change Tool for the 90s**

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