

# Adult Education and Union Education: Aspects of English Canadian Cultural History in the 20th Century

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# RESEARCH REPORTS / NOTES DE RECHERCHE

## Adult Education and Union Education: Aspects of English Canadian Cultural History in the 20th Century

Gerald Friesen

THE UNION MOVEMENT IN CANADA is under siege in the 1990s, according to its leaders. The attitude of the community toward unions is said to be negative. Understanding of the purposes served by unions, let alone sympathy for or even interest in the broader social goals of the movement is said to be at an all-time low. How did Canada reach such a state?

This paper addresses such questions within the context of the adult education movement and of union-sponsored educational and communication activities. In doing so, it defines adult education as the study of intentional forms of education (rather than the education of adults, which would encompass all of life itself), and, thus, examines formal attempts to transmit “knowledge and skills and attitudes in a variety of sites.”<sup>1</sup> It also examines union-run activities in education as well as a few of the movement’s attempts to establish a communications and public relations program. By sketching three identifiable aspects of recent Canadian labour history,

<sup>1</sup>Michael R. Welton, “Introduction: Reclaiming Our Past: Memory, Traditions, Kindling Hope,” in Welton, ed., *Knowledge for the People: The Struggle for Adult Learning in English-Speaking Canada, 1828-1973* (Toronto 1987), 3-4; a survey is Gordon Selman and Paul Dampier, *The Foundations of Adult Education in Canada* (Toronto 1991).

Gerald Friesen, “Adult Education and Union Education: Aspects of English Canadian Cultural History in the 20th Century,” *Labour/Le Travail*, 34 (Fall 1994), 163-88.

“what unions teach,” “what workers are taught,” and, to a much-reduced degree, how unions communicate, it raises the issue of workers’ attempts to assert their own definitions of public priorities and to influence the broader cultural and political agenda in Canada.

The history of adult education has not commonly been integrated into Canadian labour history. Moreover, the literature in adult education does not contain much on trade unions as vehicles of instruction. Yet Canada has had “a vital and dynamic popular adult education tradition” extending from the early 19th century to the present and unions have become important agents of educational activity in the last half-century.<sup>2</sup>

Why are adult education and union education worthy of discussion? Specialists in this field contend that adult education is at least as influential in social reproduction and popular resistance as the schooling of children.<sup>3</sup> All society is a school, they suggest, and the conceptual lessons one is taught after adolescence, the articulated and unspoken principles by which one reshapes the daily bombardment of messages and signs, can be as important as those acquired in childhood and in graded schools.

Rethinking adult and labour education has been the order of the day among union members in England and the United States. Canadian unionists, by contrast, have spent very little effort on the topic. However, an initiative undertaken by Athabasca University on the national labour computer-mediated communications network, Solinet, in the autumn of 1992, produced a respectable response of 155 messages from 20 to 25 active participants in a three-month period.<sup>4</sup> This paper is a contribution to that discussion. It is time that Canadians reviewed the place of education in the union movement and the place of the union movement in adult education.

### *1. The English and American Context*

BETWEEN THE 1840S AND THE 1940S the British and American empires exchanged positions as dominant and secondary forces in the shaping of English-language cultural expression in most of Canada, but especially among the elites. Much of the Canadian labour movement became American-led in its broader political strategy and organisational structure after 1902 but, significantly, the Canadian approach to education among workingpeople drew upon British more than

<sup>2</sup>Welton, “Introduction,” 5.

<sup>3</sup>Welton, “Introduction,” 7.

<sup>4</sup>Jeff Taylor, “Labour Education Conference on Solinet,” unpublished paper presented to Socialist Studies Conference, Ottawa, June 1993; Bruce Spencer and Jeff Taylor, “Labour Education in Canada: a SoliNet Conference,” *Labour/Le Travail*, 34 (Fall 1994); Jeff Taylor, “The Solidarity Network: Universities, Computer-Mediated Communication and Labour Studies in Canada,” in Teresa M. Harrison and Timothy D. Stephen, ed., *Computer Networking and Scholarship in the 21st Century University* (Albany forthcoming).

American models until the 1940s and 1950s. However, the pattern of Canadian expression was influenced thereafter by changes in communications technology, especially radio and movies and, most powerful of all, television, so the similarities between Canadian and American experience increased as the twentieth century proceeded.

Campaigns to teach adults the rudiments of literacy and citizenship, and institutions dedicated to upgrading the skills of professionals and to providing citizens with information or with access to the arts, have been around for several centuries. J.F.C. Harrison has described this formal activity in England as a social *movement*. It had its roots in the desire of gentlefolk and workers in the late 18th and early 19th century to encourage literacy and to smooth the path of industrial capitalism. It developed as an earnest campaign among serious people who were engaged not in "learning for leisure" but rather in expanding the realm, as they saw it, of personal and social freedom. The movement involved only a small proportion of the English population whom Harrison described as an "elite" drawn from all classes.

The English movement has been depicted as ambiguous in character, both a "movement of protest" and "a means to promote social acceptance and harmony."<sup>5</sup> This ambiguity is fundamental to a discussion of adult education among workingpeople. Harrison has suggested that the movement could be interpreted as both a middle class project designed to strengthen the social fabric by assimilating and taming the workingclass, and as a workingclass vehicle of emancipation in which the workingpeople's needs shaped the message and the medium. In the latter aspect, the workers' initiatives were designed to raise not just individuals as individuals but the entire workingclass to greater dignity and material comfort. Thus, the top-down approach controlled by an educated elite ran into the workers' interest in establishing their own institutions and writing their own prescriptions for society's ills.<sup>6</sup>

In England, by the middle decades of the 20th century, Women's Institutes and residential adult colleges and dozens of other educational groups had blurred this simple pattern to the point of "institutional anarchy." However, two additional characteristics of this anarchy should be emphasised: first, a distinction between "liberal" and "vocational" education had "hardened into a dogma" by the 1940s and 1950s; and, second, the movement's organisation was dominated by a spirit of "voluntaryism" which ensured that adult education constituted a marginal force in society, was not integrated into a coherent hierarchy of levels or tasks, and did not

<sup>5</sup>J.F.C. Harrison, *Learning and Living: 1790-1960: A Study in the History of the English Adult Education Movement* (London 1961), xii-xiv.

<sup>6</sup>The "social control" model of historical writing, very popular in Canada in the 1970s, elaborated on this theme. Michael Katz, for example, emphasized the role of schools in shaping children according to an elite-determined pattern. This approach has lost ground in recent years. See Chad Gaffield, "Children, Schooling, and Family Reproduction in Nineteenth-Century Ontario," *Canadian Historical Review*, 72, 2 (1991), 157-91.

benefit from effective political direction or from translation into social welfare policy.<sup>7</sup>

The story of American influence in Canadian union education might begin with the sources of worker consciousness in the labour movement. David Montgomery has characterised these forces as the product of daily experience mediated by activists who “persistently sought to foster a sense of unity and purposiveness among their fellow workers through the spoken and printed word, strikes, meetings, reading circles, military drill, dances, athletic and singing clubs, and co-operative stores and to promote through those activities widely shared analyses of society and of paths to the ‘emancipation of labour.’”<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, formal adult education institutions do not figure in Montgomery’s history of the American house of labour. However, one can suppose that a “North American” approach to industrial capitalism increasingly shaped Canadian workers’ experiences as the decades passed.

Agencies dedicated to worker education did emerge in the United States between 1900 and the 1920s. In the initial stages, they served as open forums and delivered lectures in reading halls and labour temples. Later, they became regular schools or colleges that offered evening and residential programs not just in literacy or language but in the many aspects of “labour studies” — law, history, economics, industrial relations, drama — that would be recognisable as the forerunners of programs in North American universities today. One notable model was Brookwood Labor College near Katonah, New York, where 25-50 students attended a two-year session (shortened to one year in the 1930s) that was comparable to today’s university programs. Brookwood ceased to operate in 1937, the casualty partly of its own radicalism and partly of the development of alternative thinking on labour and society in this pivotal decade.<sup>9</sup> Another model, pioneered by the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union (ILGWU) in New York City, combined general education and union leadership skills in a part-time program that grew into a Workers University. When it opened in 1918, this informal university offered courses in history, government, literature and labor studies; it soon added classes in five languages as well and featured such lecturers as Charles Beard.<sup>10</sup> Many of these educational vehicles were dedicated to a class-based vision of reform.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup>Harrison, *Learning and Living*, 324-7.

<sup>8</sup>David Montgomery, *The fall of the house of labor: The workplace, the state, and American labor activism, 1865-1925* (Cambridge 1987), 2.

<sup>9</sup>Jonathon D. Bloom, “Brookwood Labor College,” in Steven H. London, Elvira R. Tarr, and Joseph F. Wilson, eds., *The Re-Education of the American Working Class* (New York 1990), 63-70 and 71-84; James O. Morris, *Conflict Within the AFL: A Study of Craft Versus Industrial Unionism, 1901-1938* (Ithaca 1958).

<sup>10</sup>Elvira R. Tarr, “Union-based Labor Education: Lessons from the ILGWU,” in London, *et al.*, *Re-Education*, 63-70.

<sup>11</sup>Kenneth Teitelbaum, *Schooling for ‘Good Rebels’: Socialist Education in the US 1900-1920* (Philadelphia 1993).

A new phase of American labour education began during the New Deal years. The federal government sponsored a variety of educational projects as relief activities, the newly-founded CIO unions established their own educational departments, and state universities set up extension programs for working adults. The adult education movement then split, however, as "advanced" education parted company with union-based education. Jonathon Bloom has suggested that "the expansion and democratization of higher education after World War II perhaps obviated the need for specific 'workers universities.'"<sup>12</sup> However, the recruitment of students into higher education institutions did *not* undermine the income and occupational stratification of post-1945 American society.

Stanley Aronowitz provides a very different interpretation of the divergence between "higher education" and worker, union or "training" institutions. He sees this chapter in the American labour movement, a chapter epitomised in his view by the CIO rallying cry "President Roosevelt wants you to join a union," as the "end of independent ideological development." Because collective bargaining and the state would henceforth travel in tandem, he writes, an era not simply of social democracy but of "democratic patriotism" had begun. Year after year from the 1940s to the present, the American unions convened workshops on the administration of collective agreements, including the five main topics of grievances, bargaining, union finance and administration, union leadership, and, to a lesser degree, politics and history.<sup>13</sup> Aronowitz contends that, despite the apparently adversarial structure of the American industrial relations model, labour had become a partner within capitalism. It had legitimated the state and, in consequence, unions directed their internal efforts at membership or "instrumental" education.

"Worker education" in the United States, as distinguished from the unions' efforts to teach union leaders, merged into the broader stream of liberal higher education. The new offerings were university-run and had an academic character, especially after the workers' classes had been absorbed into university extension programs. University-defined disciplines treated unions and industrial relations as problems to be understood rather than defining their task as educating a specific group in society, the workingpeople. In 1946, when Wayne (State) University in Detroit established an Institute for Industrial Relations as the outgrowth of its worker education classes, it moved decisively away from the worker control that

<sup>12</sup>Bloom, "Brookwood," 79.

<sup>13</sup>Stanley Aronowitz, "The New Labor Education: A Return to Ideology," in London, *et al.*, *Re-Education*, 21-34; AFL President William Green put the point bluntly in 1934 when he declared: "Workers' educational work falls into three divisions: (1) discovering how the union can carry on its work more intelligently and efficiently, (2) developing the best technique for making collective bargaining successful and maintaining constructive and mutually beneficial relations with industry, and (3) helping wage earners to take part in community and national issues. The first two divisions of our problem must be worked out under union supervision and control." (Cited in Steven H. London, "Worker Education and Building the Union Movement," in London, *et al.*, *Re-Education*, 112.)

had been a part of its earlier activity. The university's concern for "standards" in the recruitment of students and in the "scholarship" transmitted in the classroom dominated the new Institute. According to a university planning document, "a number of programs offered under this subject [labour-management relations] were not properly of University caliber and should be offered by the Adult Education Program of the public schools. ... The University has, however, continued to advise both local unions and the public school system on such programs."<sup>14</sup> The Institute commenced "a shift from the education of workers to teaching about work and workers." It had "co-opted Detroit's only major public institution of higher education for programs that reified middle-class approaches to labor unionism as a set of problems to be understood, rather than continuing the earlier commitment to approach union members as a class, per se, to be educated."<sup>15</sup> This university-run system, increasingly bisected into "business" and "labour studies" streams, also was fractionalised by academic or "disciplinary" preoccupations that distinguished the sociology of industrial relations from the economics of industrial relations and the history of industrial relations.

If "tools courses" and university constituted two types of worker education after 1950, American unions launched a third type of education in succeeding decades. This stream, labelled by Aronowitz the "service model" of union education, underwrites activities that improve the mobility chances of the individual rather than the conditions of the group. Education becomes another "service" provided members by an increasingly-distant union bureaucracy that sees its role as administrator as much as representative. Courses in creative retirement, basic literacy, accessing television, retraining for computer-based occupations, and university credits toward degrees, for example, are funded through the union contract in lieu of wages.

Three overriding issues emerge from the English and American history of adult and union education: first, the great difference in the class perspective on such schooling, because the middle and workingclass did not agree on its purpose nor whether it was aimed at individual or community betterment; second, the growing dichotomy between liberal and vocational education, the former increasingly labelled "higher" and the latter increasingly demeaned as "training"; third, the contest over how such education should be organised and delivered, whether by a state system, a patchwork of voluntary agencies, or by universities as autonomous,

<sup>14</sup>"Proposal for Three-Year Continuation and Expansion of the Program of the Institute for Industrial Relations of Wayne University," 11 September 1952, cited in Michael Kahan "The Wayne State Institute of Industrial Relations: Worker Education Was Not Meant to Be," in London, *et al.*, *Re-Education*, 85-98; the context is discussed in Steve Babson, Ron Alpern, Dave Elsila and John Revitte, *Working Detroit: The Making of a Union Town* (New York 1984).

<sup>15</sup>Kahan, "Wayne State," 88.

discipline-directed agents of learning. These great questions were never addressed directly by the entire community and, thus, were decided by accident and chance.

## *II. The Adult Education Movement in Canada 1900-1960*

THE AMBIGUITY OF AIM AND CONSTITUENCY that dominated the English experience with adult education was repeated in Canada between the 1830s and the 1920s. The Mechanics' Institutes and similar programs of the 19th century were established by the elites and, though the workers' response to them is uncertain, the elite's agenda was evident in the Institute's offerings. However, in the opening four decades of the 20th century, examples of both elite-sponsored and worker-run education institutions contested for control of popular adult education. Some Canadian institutions, such as Frontier College, represented both tendencies. Thus, this famous movement to establish classrooms "in the bush," which was run for fifty years by two middleclass reformers, Alfred Fitzpatrick and Edmund Bradwin, can be described as an expression both of humane elite values and of worker-controlled education. Its primary goal was worker literacy and remains unchanged to this day.<sup>16</sup>

The Workers' Educational Association, the single most important of the adult education groups within the urban workingclass, began as an elite-run group promoting Imperial solidarity. It was founded by Toronto educational and business leaders in 1918 and lodged in the University of Toronto, where it was expected to cultivate Imperial ties and to educate worker leaders in "responsible," disciplined, and critical thought. It achieved a following during the difficult decade of the 1920s. By the 1930s, it had expanded across the country (24 branches in Ontario and 15 in the rest of Canada by 1940), and workers' leaders had taken control of its activities. The university official charged with responsibility fought against this worker incursion, precipitating confrontations similar to those experienced by worker groups in England and the United States. The WEA, as a workers' organisation in a middle class university, could not transcend these difficulties because it was dedicated both to liberal educational ideals and to a distinct workingclass interest.

Among the other community-based models of adult education that denied the relevance of class lines, the most celebrated was the Antigonish movement. It had begun in the opening decades of the 20th century as a Roman Catholic Church-led movement to rescue *individual* Maritimers from poverty and ignorance but, through the development of cooperative institutions and the foundation of a university-based Extension service, it had grown beyond individualism into a movement dedicated to *community* action. The Antigonish movement "presented itself to the world as the 'middle way' between the extremities of collectivism and individualism," and it worked "from the ground up, rather than from the top down."

<sup>16</sup>George L. Cook, "Educational Justice for the Campmen: Alfred Fitzpatrick and the Foundation of Frontier College, 1899-1922," in Welton, *Knowledge for the People*, 35-51.



Its leader, Father Moses Coady, was emphatically not a socialist, nor did he rely upon the state, but he did place great faith in "participatory democracy" and community-based "economic co-operation."<sup>17</sup> As in the WEA, the conflicts between individual and community, between university detachment and class loyalty, never were resolved.

The Women's Institute, like the rural communities from which it sprang, also occupied an ambiguous class location. Founded in Canada, it was an adult education vehicle that grew to encompass the country and then to span the world. One branch that has been studied, the British Columbia Women's Institute, concentrated on five teaching areas: health, agriculture, home economics, law, and the Institute's methods and programs including parliamentary procedure and branch administration. As Carol Dennison has noted, women utilised club membership "as an opportunity to exercise some control and power over community decisions." The provincial government viewed the rural WIs as vehicles for the preservation of farm life and the family itself, and put considerable resources into the promotion of the clubs. Both grass-roots and elite-sponsored in character, the WIs are not easily located as either working or middle class in orientation.<sup>18</sup>

The generation between the 1930s and the 1960s should be seen as pivotal in the 20th century history of Canadian adult education. By extension, it was central to the history of workingclass cultural expression, though more for its subversion of an autonomous worker perspective than for contributions to its development. The growing Canadian network of adult education vehicles received considerable assistance in the mid-1930s, including donations from the Carnegie Corporation, provincial government support in response to concerns about social stability, and the development of a cadre of activists.<sup>19</sup> At that time, a national clearinghouse for information in the field, the Canadian Association for Adult Education, was established. Several years later, under the leadership of E.A. Corbett, the CAAE

<sup>17</sup>Jim Lotz and Michael R. Welton, "'Knowledge for the People': The Origins and Development of the Antigonish Movement," in Welton, *Knowledge for the People*, 107-9.

<sup>18</sup>Carol J. Dennison, "'Housekeepers of the Community': The British Columbia Women's Institutes, 1909-1946," in Welton, *Knowledge For The People*, 52-69; also Jeffery Taylor, *Fashioning Farmers: Ideology, Agricultural Knowledge and the Manitoba Farm Movement, 1890-1925* (Regina 1994).

<sup>19</sup>The British Columbia government increased its support for adult education in remarkable fashion during the 1930s. The expansion, which included community theatre, recreational and self-help groups, is discussed in Gordon Selman, "Government's Role in Adult Education: Two Periods of Active Leadership in British Columbia, 1933-39 and 1976-1983," in Frank Cassidy, ed., *Creating Citizens: Reflections on the Recent History of Continuing Education in British Columbia*, Pacific Association of Continuing Education, PACE Papers I; see also Selman's, "A Chronology of Adult Education in British Columbia" (Vancouver 1977). The Carnegie role is noted in Gordon Selman, "The Canadian Association for Adult Education in the Corbett Years: A Re-Evaluation" (Vancouver 1981).

exchanged its relatively neutral and "professional" role for one that led it deeper and deeper into social activism.

A graduate of a Presbyterian theological college, social gospeller, crusader for citizen-led democracy, anti-war activist and Canadian nationalist, Corbett converted the CAAE into a leading promoter of citizenship education during World War Two. Together with a small band estimated to include about thirty or forty people, Corbett drove the CAAE to endorse a "Manifesto" in 1943 (the word itself illustrates the atmosphere), which promised "a new Canadian and world society," argued that "academic aloofness and neutrality are not enough," called for "social controls and planning" including the probable extension of public ownership, and launched a "whole-hearted campaign of public education directed towards the winning of a people's war and a people's peace."<sup>20</sup> A year later, in his Director's Report to the annual meeting of the CAAE, Corbett agreed that his association had "undergone a complete change" and alluded to uneasiness among some members in the movement about the CAAE's ideological leanings but did not back away from his ambitious plans: "adult education is not just a technique or a special field of education, but a means, perhaps the only means by which men and women can be prepared for a new social order, a means of establishing the moral and ideological basis from which action can take shape."<sup>21</sup> Though the class perspective of this reformism was ambiguous, the activists' militancy and their determination to refashion capitalism (by reference to social democracy or to another version of oppositional ideology), had pushed Canada's adult education movement sharply to the left.

The activities of the National Film Board demonstrated the power of the adult education movement but also its ambiguous relations with the state and with class loyalties. The Board had been created only in 1939 but quickly became a force in the domestic war effort by virtue of its educational potential. It was led by John Grierson, "who considered himself first and foremost an adult educator," and who was an apostle of film as educational medium. Film, he wrote, "belongs to the people as no other social institution in the world before. It is the only genuinely

<sup>20</sup>J.R. Kidd, ed., *Learning and Society*, (Toronto 1963), 108-9, and Selman interview with Kidd, cited in Gordon R. Selman, "The CAAE in the Corbett Years," 11-12. Michael Welton writes that Watson Thomson actually drafted this Manifesto; "Mobilizing the People for Socialism: The Politics of Adult Education in Saskatchewan, 1944-45," in Welton, *Knowledge for the People*, 152.

<sup>21</sup>Director's Report 1944, CAAE, cited in Selman "The CAAE in the Corbett Years," 15-16; also Michael Welton, "'On the Eve of a Great Mass Movement': Reflections on the Origins of the CAAE," in Frank Cassidy and Ron Faris, eds., *Choosing Our Future: Adult Education and Public Policy in Canada* (Toronto 1987); the debate between social activists and defenders of a "business" perspective had been joined. In the following decade, business leaders and centre and right political parties fought back, insisting that the image of the "free enterprise system" must be rehabilitated and that "bias" had no part in Association activities.

democratic institution that has ever appeared on world wide scale."<sup>22</sup> Grierson was especially keen on the documentary which, he suggested, would permit the government to convey information and elicit citizen cooperation while also enabling a teacher to interpret community realities and to promote community action. His key message was "education for active citizenship" but he coupled this idealism with an uncritical faith in the State. He once wrote: "I have believed that in education was the heart of the matter, but that education needed to be revolutionized. ... it is only if the State is fighting for democracy that it has a dog's chance of coming through."<sup>23</sup> As Juliet Pollard has noted, "in one form or another, most of the [NFB] films argued that farmers and industrial workers had power if they cooperated with government in the democratic process."<sup>24</sup>

There is no agreement on whether the Film Board succeeded as an educational vehicle but rural, factory, trade union and citizen film circuits (the latter called Volunteer Projection Services), blanketed the country in the 1940s and provided forums for several million Canadians to discuss public affairs. According to Juliet Pollard, the NFB program represented "a great experiment to mould and shape the minds of men and women." The films themselves were crude, however, and probably raised more questions than they answered. Pollard judges the NFB experiment a failure and Joyce Nelson argues that Grierson never understood a Canadian sense of place nor truly wished to establish community democracy.<sup>25</sup> In the context of its role in adult education, one can emphasize the NFB's alliance with the government (for good or ill), its exceptional reach in Canadian society, and its power in mobilizing citizen discussions in community forums. But its ambiguity also blunted its impact as a vehicle of oppositional culture; indeed, Joyce Nelson suggests that Grierson was a stalking horse for nascent multinational business empires.

A very different experiment in adult education was launched by North America's first social democratic government, the CCF of Saskatchewan, shortly after it came to power in 1944. Tommy Douglas' administration created a Division of Adult Education that, in the words of one of its planning documents, would encourage 500,000 men and women "to become active citizens and fully-rounded

<sup>22</sup>Grierson in *Motion Picture News*, 1926 (a series of articles), cited in Juliet Pollard, "Propaganda for Democracy: John Grierson and Adult Education During the Second World War," in Welton, *Knowledge for the People*, 131.

<sup>23</sup>Forsyth Hardy, *John Grierson: A Documentary Biography* (London 1979), 126, cited in Pollard, "Propaganda for Democracy," 145. A critique of Grierson is provided in Joyce Nelson, *The Colonized Eye: Rethinking the Grierson Legend* (Toronto 1988). Another view is Gary Evans, *John Grierson and the National Film Board: The Politics of Wartime Propaganda* (Toronto 1984).

<sup>24</sup>Pollard, "Propaganda for Democracy," 132-3.

<sup>25</sup>Pollard, "Propaganda for Democracy," 144-5 and Nelson, *The Colonized Eye*, 59-73 and 95-100.

personalities.<sup>26</sup> Attacked by a business newspaper as a potential Goebbels, and by social democrats as a secret Communist, its Director Watson Thomson was asked to resign by the CCF cabinet within 18 months of his appointment. The ideal of a province-wide system of discussion groups that would reshape political consciousness and replace individualism with community values was then toned down.<sup>27</sup> Thomson's departure is interpreted by leftist historians as yet another victory for an anti-democratic, top-down Fabianism, the ascendancy of "cabinet government, not ... the culture of left populism."<sup>28</sup>

The harshness of this judgment ignores the difficulty of the times, though it is not wrong as an assessment of the direction of political reform in Saskatchewan. The years between 1944 and the early 1950s were exceptionally difficult for the left in Canada because of the Cold War, the Gouzenko spy scare, and state-led repression of the left. The impact of these events on adult education and the union movement cannot be exaggerated. John Grierson withdrew from the 1945-47 Manitoba Royal Commission on Adult Education, presumably because he was publicly charged with harbouring Communist sympathies. The other commissioners found it necessary to begin their Report with a statement on "the problem of adult education in relation to government and the dangers of propaganda." They also noted that Watson Thomson in Saskatchewan "had stepped across the boundary which separates the legitimate supporting function of government in adult education, on the one hand, and the dangerous attempt to direct public thought in accordance with a departmental creed, on the other."<sup>29</sup> Though governments had been very interested in the possibilities of cultural engineering during the war, they backed off when peace returned. And plans for a radical, community-based, state-promoted "democracy" were sent back to the drawingboard for revision.

Adult education in Canada in the 1930s-60s generation also underwent the fragmentation experienced by the English and American movements. However, the movement did not descend into unco-ordinated anarchy. Nor did it rely solely on voluntarism for support; indeed, the state played a part in underwriting important new ventures in adult education, experimenting with a variety of community-based models of education that attained a quite remarkable social reach. British Columbia undertook a series of experiments in the 1930s and then surveyed the entire field in 1941. Ontario convened a Royal Commission on education in 1945 that devoted attention to this field. Saskatchewan created its Division of Adult Education in 1944 and Manitoba established a Royal Commission exclusively on

<sup>26</sup>"Outline of the Proposed Study-Action Plan," WM Harding Papers, cited in Michael R. Welton, "Mobilizing the People for Socialism: The Politics of Adult Education in Saskatchewan, 1944-45," in Welton, *Knowledge for the People*, 158.

<sup>27</sup>Welton, "Mobilizing the People."

<sup>28</sup>John Richards and Larry Pratt, *Prairie Capitalism: Power and Influence in the New West* (Toronto 1979) and Welton "Mobilizing the People," 151, 164-6.

<sup>29</sup>Manitoba Royal Commission on Adult Education, *Report* (Winnipeg 1947), 10, 55.

adult education in 1945 that eventually recommended the creation of a central public-private coordinating agency for the province. And the 1949 federal Royal Commission on the Arts, Letters and Sciences, popularly known as the Massey Commission, should also be seen in this light. The fact that the Commissioners put so much weight on federal government-sponsored institutions, from the NFB and the CBC to the Canada Council and the National Library and National Archives, should be recognised as state involvement in adult education.

If these experiments demonstrate the interest of the State in adult education and the ambiguity of Canadian social democracy as a vehicle of workingclass opposition in the 1940s, they also suggest that coordination and agreement on content were not as far from achievement in Canada as in England. Indeed, the considerable success of the CAAE as a coordinating body for Canada's adult education movement in the decade or even two decades after the war should be emphasised. Through one of its continuing committees, the Joint Planning Commission, the CAAE coordinated the adult education activities of many agencies (around 100 participated annually in the 1950s) between 1946 and 1963. The JPC's annual conference must seem in retrospect a typically Canadian event as earnest educators from across the country exchanged ideas and discussed trends, but it did permit dozens of groups to select a *single* theme for hundreds and thousands of educational groups, and it did gather a single library of research materials that shaped the coming year's activities. The CAAE supplied print and audiovisual materials on this defined study topic (intercultural relations, civil liberties, labour and management in relation to the community, broadcasting policy in relation to television, labour education, education in correctional institutions, retraining and employment), and thereby acted as a curriculum guide for the entire field of Canadian adult education.<sup>30</sup>

Four points emerge from this narrative of Canada's adult education experience. First, the class-related ambiguity of adult education in England and the United States was certainly reflected in the Canadian history of the movement; second, the Canadian state, unlike the English, did become involved in the enterprise; third, coordination of a country-wide program through an arms-length agency (the CAAE), contrasted with both the English and the American movements; and, fourth, a distinctive Canadian "middle way," in which class divisions were to be transcended by "community" priorities, did evolve from public discussion.

The leaders of the Canadian adult education movement were populists, community organisers, social gospel idealists, democrats. They used the codeword "citizenship education" to express their ideal of an involved, informed, creative population. They tried to transcend the class loyalties of other societies — but especially the English — and to incorporate citizens of all ranks into their groups.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup>Selman, "The CAAE in the Corbett Years," 26-33.

<sup>31</sup>For an illustration of the ways in which Canada's classness was denied, see Manitoba Royal Commission, *Report*, 1947. Unions in Canada were not a people's movement as in Britain, its authors reported [130], and clerical workers belonged to the middle class [134].

With the help of the state, they believed, they could use adult education vehicles such as the study club to build a classless, democratic, cohesive community. Commencing in the 1930s, expanding their activities to a remarkable degree during the 1940s, and maintaining considerable power as coordinator of education and designer of the public agenda during the 1950s, they were far more influential than one might have imagined possible. After the post-War chill concerning "propaganda" and the state, they approached their task with greater caution but they did not shrink from what they saw as the exciting challenge of creating an "active citizenry."

### *III. The Canadian Labour movement as a vehicle of adult education 1930s-70s*

THE CANADIAN UNION MOVEMENT, like the American, was transformed between the mid-1930s and the mid-1940s by an extraordinary conjuncture which included Roosevelt's policies on union recognition and bargaining, Stalin's Popular or Common Front edict (which turned the energies of Canadian Communists toward social democratic parties and the mainstream union movement), the rapid growth of industrial unions, and the establishment of a new collective bargaining system. Because the new system put a premium on administrative and bargaining talent, union leaders scrambled to teach the appropriate skills to a proportion of their membership. Like their American counterparts, Canadian union educators no longer tried to offer a coherent, integrated curriculum directed toward community-wide social change. Thus, while the broader adult education movement was establishing its non-class perspective on the world and selecting the issues for public debate, Canadian unions joined their American counterparts in introducing "tools courses" that provided only a limited vision of the wider world.

Union education underwent significant development during the 1940s. Radio, film, slides, filmstrips, an agency for the provision of information on labour law, educational seminars, and even a permanent summer school in a former Ontario art college became organised labour's weapons in the battle to influence policy and to promote its interests in collective bargaining. The WEA inspired much of this activity, and thus provided a non-partisan home for educational activities outside the bitter warfare of Canadian union politics in which supporters of the CCF fought Communists.

The memoirs of Allen Schroeder illustrate the evolution of this union-based educational activity. Having moved to St. Catherines in the 1930s, this prairie-born product of the social gospel and the cooperative movement organized CCF "study sessions [which] were essential for a social democratic party." When he joined the United Auto Workers in 1939 or 1940, he added union campaigning to his activities. In both guises, opposition to Communism was a driving force in his organising work. He helped to develop "a cell of CCF supporters in every department" of the GM plant, joined a "Reuther Caucus" in Local #199 (that also operated in a UE local at a plant of the English Electric Company next door to his Conroy

Manufacturing), and taught group discipline and anti-Soviet lessons to his workmates in order that they might overcome the "discipline" and "indoctrination" of his Communist opponents: "My name will never be mentioned in the history books, but I can say without fear of being proven wrong that from the time of the meeting in Walter Reuther's home in 1941 until the end of 1948 I spent as much time combatting the Communist domination of our unions as any other trade union leader in Canada."<sup>32</sup>

The WEA was a part of all these struggles. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, however, it ran headlong into the Red Scare, and by 1952 it was moribund. Its collapse, according to Radforth and Sangster, was due partly to the success of such competitors as television and newer adult education vehicles, partly to personal conflicts that had been intensified by the Cold War, but also to "its failure to become the educational arm of the labour movement."<sup>33</sup> Thus, it was doomed by the emergence of large industrial unions that "had the incentive and means to create their own educational departments." As an institution that had existed in an uneasy tension between union and university, between criticism of the union movement and complacency, between militancy and conservatism, the WEA had simply mistaken the tenor of the times and the power of new cultural institutions. The errors were fatal for this one adult education vehicle and have handicapped Canadian labour ever since.

Radforth and Sangster place part of the blame at the door of the individual who led the WEA for 21 years, Drummond Wren: "There is much to admire about Wren's commitment to an autonomous educational body dedicated to teaching workers how to think critically. Such a system not only can enrich the student, but it can also create a more active and critical union membership, ever ready to review union policies. Wren's intellectual weakness was in placing too much faith in university professors, in assuming their teaching would be quite free of bias and that they, too, were deeply committed to developing the critical abilities of their students. His political weakness was his inability to secure the co-operation of labour leaders who felt threatened by the Association's autonomy and who had the financial means to provide their own educational facilities that they could control."<sup>34</sup> Given the imperfect world of all institutions, Radforth and Sangster are too critical of Wren's intellectual weaknesses. It is true that he, and many of his worker education allies, valued the skills and "pure" knowledge of the professors with whom they worked, and often shared with them "a liberal view of education as unbiased and

<sup>32</sup>NAC (MG 31 B43) Schroeder Papers, "Autobiography of Allen Eugene Schroeder," (ms., revised 1984) 26, 25, 15-35.

<sup>33</sup>Ian Radforth and Joan Sangster, "'A Link Between Labour and Learning': The Workers Educational Association in Ontario, 1917-1951," *Labour/Le Travail*, 8/9 (1981-82), 76. For Drummond Wren's own account of the WEA, see his 57 page summary dated "31 March 1951 Toronto"; I would like to thank Ian Radforth for the opportunity to see this document, which is filed in the Centre for Industrial Relations Library, University of Toronto.

<sup>34</sup>Radforth and Sangster, "Link," 76.

neutral," and it is also true that "any contradiction between these conceptions of education was never directly confronted."<sup>35</sup> But the WEA did not founder because of the inevitable development of tensions between academic freedom and union sponsorship; it failed because a specific battle between anti-communists and WEA defenders resulted in the defeat and discrediting of the WEA. Thus, the power of the Cold War was probably one crucial cause of its demise. A second was the left's battle over the shape of Canadian and North American capitalism, over what they could tolerate and what they could hope to change: essentially, a majority in the Canadian labour movement opted for the social democratic version of the politically possible, and shaped their educational institutions to conform to that aspiration.

To arrive at a preliminary sketch of union educational activities in these decades, I have relied on the papers of two labour leaders and on interviews with two veterans of the movement. Allen Schroeder, who became a UAW local representative in the early 1950s and Education Director of the UAW's Canadian Region in the 1960s, prepared a manuscript memoir on his career. This document can be juxtaposed with the extensive personal papers of another union educator, Lincoln Bishop, a long-time employee of the Canadian Congress of Labour and, after its formation in 1956, the Canadian Labour Congress, where he was employed in the Education Department and served on the Political Action Committee. Ed Finn and Gil Levine were employed as educators, researchers and communicators between the 1950s and the 1980s. All four sources suggest the narrowing and streamlining of the union movement's education work in this generation.

Schroeder and Bishop taught and supervised hundreds of union courses. In the 1940s and 1950s, they spoke of "social democratic ideals" and distributed material on the struggle to change world politics.<sup>36</sup> The most revealing document of this phase was a manuscript textbook for a course on "History and Function of Trade Unions in Canada," dated January 1947, that explained why the strike was "so peculiarly a working class weapon." The anonymous author asserted that this "is not a romantic fancy: it is a cold, hard fact. ... the worker has only his labour to sell" and must struggle to sell it dearly. Thus, a strike "is a reflection of the basic insecurity and the consequent social conflict which is part and parcel of the capitalist system." And what mattered in the end was "whether the struggle as a whole will result in victory — in the co-operative commonwealth for which we as socialists are striving."<sup>37</sup> This text, which presumably formed part of a course repeated several times in the next few years, accords with the militant, contestational, class-based approach so common in labour relations during the Second World War and with the expectation of an eventual socialist victory.

<sup>35</sup>Radforth and Sangster, "Link," 77.

<sup>36</sup>Schroeder, "Autobiography," 2; NAC (MG 31 B18) Lincoln Bishop Papers, File 19 "International Affairs" and "Canada's Stake in World Affairs."

<sup>37</sup>Bishop Papers, Box 3, File 18 "Course III: History and Function of Trade Unions in Canada" (mimeo ms., anon, January 1947) "Lesson Four: The Strike," 33, 34, 44.



The contrast between this textbook and the supplementary course materials utilised in the 1960s and 1970s is remarkable. Guidelines for instructors at the 1975 summer school of the Canadian Labour Congress represented the very different tone adopted by the union movement in a time of apparent abundance. Union members in the 1975 program were asked what they might do to enrich their work experience and the lives of their families and communities, how the labour movement might seek new objectives or raise the aspirations of "the average union member," and how the union and the community might learn from each other. The areas to be explored in group discussion included preparation for retirement, youth alienation from unions, and whether unions, having done an "excellent job in improving wages, hours and working conditions," might turn to new goals in the future.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>38</sup>Bishop Papers Box 3, File 3, "Guidelines for Instructors," CLC Summer School 1975. Schroeder's recollections of his courses, written not long after the event, noted that "Labour economics showed them [the union members] the justice of their fight ... [for adequate pensions, health coverage, wages and job security] as well as the need to support their political organization, the New Democratic Party, for laws to protect all working people." In his discussion of the founding of a UAW educational centre in Michigan, he added with approval that spouses participated in the classes and that "Invariably, the family goes home more united and more determined to work together to build a better union and a better society." Schroeder, "Autobiography," 47, 56.

Many of the course materials in Bishop's files from the 1960s and 1970s emphasise that the union delivered better wages and hours. As the "Home Study Course (Basic)" of the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Trainmen and General Workers explained, unions existed "... for the primary purpose of maintaining and improving the wages and working conditions of their members." It added that unions would also "promote social and economic improvements for the benefit of society. (These are political objectives which led trade unions, in cooperation with other groups, to form a political party, the NDP, in 1961.)" The Home Study course noted that conflicts between employers and workers were "inevitable," and suggested that such struggles would occur especially over matters of "increased pay and shorter hours." Bishop Papers, Box 2, File 14, CBRT&GW "Home Study Course (Basic)" by Harry Jacks, Director of Education Department, ca.1969-70.

A similar perspective was offered by the "AFL-CIO Training Institutes for Young Trade Unionists" (1968) which explained that "The labor movement, more than any other single political or social force, has given the worker a measurable stake in today's America. ... The movement has offered workers practical alternatives to an all-powerful state or submission to arbitrary demands of corporations." Unions, in this view, were dedicated to obtaining a "fair share" of the "constantly rising" standard of living in the United States. (p.1-1)

A note of self-congratulation was evident in Allen Schroeder's comment that, in the 1960s, his UAW had created "the finest and most comprehensive labour education program of any union in North America." Schroeder, "Autobiography," 56.

Morden Lazarus, a product of the 1940s social democratic movement in Canada, spoke about working conditions and national politics as well as income in his articulation of union purposes: "the essential role of unions in our society" was a matter of organisation for

The pattern revealed in Schroeder's memoir and in Bishop's personal papers seems to be evident in the work of the Canadian Labour Congress. In the 1950s and 1960s, the CLC devoted considerable attention to new concerns in Canadian society. Thus, for example, co-operative housing schemes and consumer education occupied significant places in union educational programs. But the main focus, as a matter of necessity, was the training of officers. Of the 370 students who attended the 1966 CLC summer school in Ontario, 120 took steward's training and 110 collective bargaining (62 per cent of all registrations), while the remaining 140 students enrolled in nine courses ranging from automation and psychology to public speaking and social legislation. The Labour Council Weekend Institutes in this period also gave pride of place to technical training, from bargaining and stewards classes to public speaking and parliamentary procedure.<sup>39</sup>

The main project in labour education to exceed these bounds was the establishment between 1958 and 1963 of a Labour College of Canada. The College was a response to the new institutional role of unions in the collective bargaining system and of the unions' need for trained leaders. A 1965 speech on the College explained: "such leadership must go beyond acquiring particular skills in negotiation and organization. A Labour College, providing basic studies in the humanities and social sciences as well as specialized instruction in the theory and practice of trade unionism, does much to meet this need, especially since it was founded and is operated with the full cooperation of the universities. It opens the way to higher studies for men and women who, though intellectually competent, may not meet formal university entrance standards. For those who show particular academic ability, it could provide a bridge to a full university degree program."<sup>40</sup> However, even the Labour College course focussed far more on technical skills and the industrial relations system than on broader ideological and community concerns. When it recommended or otherwise cooperated in the offering of further academic or educational services, it structured its observations in terms of the credits and

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improved wages and working conditions, of "security against arbitrary and discriminatory acts by the employer," but also of "improvements in social conditions not only for themselves but for all Canadians both on the economic and political fronts." Unions, he wrote, also should seek a "fair break in labour legislation and a reasonable climate of public opinion." Morden Lazarus, "Labour Looks to the Future," CLC Summer School June 1962, in Bishop Papers, Box 2, File 2 Bishop Papers.

<sup>39</sup>Bishop Papers, Box 2, File 16, "CLC Education Manual," (ca. 1967).

<sup>40</sup>"Speakers Notes on Labour College of Canada," 5 March 1965, Bishop Papers, Box 2, File 16, in CLC, "Education Manual," (ca. 1969).

In another document in this file, reprinted from *Canadian Labour* (September 1968), a "Summary of Labour College Survey" reported that of the 399 graduates in 1963-67, 220 replied to a questionnaire on their post-College experience. Of these respondents, nearly half had risen to higher positions in the union or to full-time staff positions, nearly half had taught union courses, over two-thirds had since registered for further education as part-time students, and over 85 per cent remained in the union movement.

degrees of the university liberal arts system. Nevertheless, several activists have testified that the College did create "life-long trade unionists."<sup>41</sup>

#### *IV. Union Communications and Public Relations Strategies*

THE LABOUR MOVEMENT also attempted to educate and influence the broader community to the importance of unions. These attempts were, inevitably, small-scale and unsophisticated in the early years of the consumer revolution.<sup>42</sup> A survey of union communications activities in 1968-69 revealed that only eight of 37 labour councils to respond (and 83 did not respond), had public relations committees. These eight issued press releases, organised labour day celebrations, sponsored scholarships and sports teams and community projects; three arranged speaker programs for local schools and community groups. Most of the respondents agreed that they needed assistance in improving their public relations and added that education of their own members, as well as the public, could be improved.<sup>43</sup> A 1965 course outline on "Labour and the Public" noted that, in general, Canadians approved of unions by a margin of about three to one (60-66 per cent to 14-23 per cent, though 11-15 per cent had no opinion, according to polls taken between 1950 and 1961) but its suggestions for the improvement of union public relations were primitive.<sup>44</sup>

The most ambitious attempts to influence public opinion occurred in the launch of a Labour Education Week during the 1960s, in which the CLC encouraged trade union councils to set up displays in stores and libraries, to dispatch speakers to schools and service clubs, to hold coffee meetings with pensioners, to stage a "fashion show of union-made clothes" or a "consumer program" to reach women, to secure a special advertising section in local newspapers, and to arrange stories or interviews for the media.<sup>45</sup> None of this worked very well. A CLC employee told a 1970 staff seminar on "Communications" that "The greatest weakness our

<sup>41</sup>Paul Moist, CUPE 500 Winnipeg, personal communication.

<sup>42</sup>One early public relations effort was a CLC Farmer-Labour Program in 1956 that consisted of draws and exhibits and free balloons in a "Farmer Meet Labour Tent" at 25 fall fairs in Ontario. It seems to have been judged a failure. "Agriculture," file 2, Box 1, Bishop Papers.

Donald L. Montgomery's, "A Teaching Guide for Collective Bargaining," (1961) offered sensible advice on public relations strategies in a chapter on "The Public and the Negotiations." File 11, Box 3, Bishop Papers.

<sup>43</sup>"Labour History," in File 18, Box 5, Bishop Papers.

<sup>44</sup>"Labour and the Public," CLC Course Outline ca.1965, Bishop Papers, Box 2, File 17. It suggested that a press committee be named, that members of the press be contacted personally, that concise, typed press releases be prepared, that letters be sent to the editor, and that there were various "publics" to be influenced ranging from merchants and clergy to teachers and farmers.

<sup>45</sup>"Labour Education Week," (CLC) File 12, Box 1, Bishop Papers.

movement suffers from today is a failure to communicate effectively with both its own membership and the public at large."<sup>46</sup>

The reflections of two long-time union leaders corroborate the impression that education and communication represented areas of difficulty. Ed Finn worked for nearly thirty years in union public relations departments, first for the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway, Transport and General Workers (CBRT) and then for the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE).<sup>47</sup> Finn argues that public relations departments of the major unions in Canada had two main functions between the 1950s and 1980s, to edit newsletters (or some version of a publication), and to write speeches and otherwise assist the union leadership in presenting the unions' perspectives to the public. Another major department of the large Canadian unions, the Education department, also was involved in a type of communications activity, because it taught classes in various skills and problem areas to union leaders. Despite the best efforts of these two branches of the movement in Canada, he says, the attempts of the big unions to communicate a positive message to the Canadian public and even to its own members have been woefully inadequate.<sup>48</sup>

Gil Levine worked in the Research Department of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (and its predecessor), from the mid-1950s until his retirement in 1988. Suspect in the eyes of his colleagues in the newly-merged union, he was not permitted to shape the work of his union's Education Department. Like Finn, Levine deplores the union's exclusive reliance on "tools courses" and its failure to establish direct contact with its membership. He suggests that, in the case of national union publications, most unions would dispatch small numbers of magazines or newspapers to branch secretaries who were expected to distribute them to a limited circle. Though he respected the work of the Public Relations department, he thought its main enterprises, press releases and print advertising, were largely wasted because they concealed the relative inability of the union to engage its members in direct conversation.<sup>49</sup> Ed Finn corroborated this judgment

<sup>46</sup>Jack Williams, "Speech on Communications to CLC Staff Seminar, 9 January 1970," in File 12, Box 1, Bishop Papers.

<sup>47</sup>For fourteen years Finn also wrote a labour column in the *Toronto Star*, the most progressive of Canada's urban dailies. Recently, from his position as a Research Associate in a progressive policy group, he has written a number of speeches and articles on the place of "Communications" in the union movement's list of priorities. The interview was conducted in Ottawa on 23 August 1993.

<sup>48</sup>One significant attempt to address the changing educational scene was summarised in *Labour-University Cooperation on Education: A report on the National Conference on Labour Education sponsored by the Canadian Labour Congress and the Canadian Association for Adult Education held at Ottawa December 15th to 17th, 1956*. Another conference followed up on these issues, and the CLC devoted considerable staff time and paper to the effort; the subject probably merits investigation.

<sup>49</sup>Gil Levine, interview with author, Ottawa, 8 June 1993.

by suggesting that the union publications, "regardless of how good their contents and appearance, still are read by only 5 per cent of our members — if we're lucky."<sup>50</sup>

The daily press, and even the periodical press, represented and still represent great failures of organised labour in Canada. Local federations of unions, and the larger country-wide groups, published weeklies or monthlies in the early part of the century but these fell on hard times in the 1930s and 1940s. The larger unions revived them as one-page contributions to the flashier magazines produced by the American head office. Thus, for example, Margot Thompson was hired by the Steelworkers in 1947 to edit the English-language, Canadian items for its journal, *Steel News*, and was seconded to the advisory committee for "Citizen's Forum," the weekly radio and later television program, and the editorial board of *Food for Thought*, both of which were sponsored by the Canadian Association for Adult Education. She was treated, she said, as "the low man on the totem pole" and asked to do the "extra" tasks such as setting up a union library. Yet she sustained reductions in pay that applied only to the women in the union office, and thus was pushed into a lonely campaign for "equal pay for equal work." Her unhappy, unequal struggle was a sign of women's status in the union but also of the status of educational activities.<sup>51</sup>

The one enterprise that attempted to provide an alternative to the conventional content of the national press was actually a free-lance operation conducted by one committed journalist. The Co-operative Press Association syndicated materials for the "Canadian trade union and labour-oriented political press on social, economic and political issues." Founded by Morden Lazarus in 1944, it initially served one labour and nine CCF papers; within a decade, it was supported by 17 paying subscribers, three from the CCF and fourteen from unions. It produced an impressive package, by all accounts, and included regular reports from New Zealand (Maurice Kitching), England (Michael Foot and later Douglas Jay), Ottawa (Doris French and, later, Cliff Scotton) and cartoons by Bert Grassick. But it remained a shoestring operation, as is its contemporary successor, the Canadian Association of Labour Media (CALM).<sup>52</sup>

In the heady days around the close of the Second World War, the CCF actually considered setting up a network of provincial weeklies that might become "a national force, with national scope." In 1946 it went one step further, a crucial step if the power of the *Manchester Guardian* in English politics is taken into account, of considering the case for a national newspaper of the left. The chief objection at the time was that "it will not provide a satisfactory substitute for provincial papers

<sup>50</sup>Finn, "Labour and the media," mss. of speech to Canadian Association of Labour Media, c. 1989, 10.

<sup>51</sup>The fact that she donated this "Equal Pay File" to the National Archives of Canada is testimony to her perception of the event; Margot Thompson papers, NAC (MG 31 B28): see Thompson to Brother Mahoney, 28 January 1957, to I.W. Abel, 27 March 1958, and to Ray Pansnick, 11 November 1966.

<sup>52</sup>NAC MG 28 I176 Co-operative Press Association Papers, "The CPA Record," Volume 7.

and provincial news." Thus, despite a modest budget that would have permitted the preparation of a 16-page tabloid (12 pages of national material and 4 empty pages in which local news might have been inserted), the project was tabled.<sup>53</sup> Like the winding up of the WEA, it was an unfortunate — if understandable — decision.

The Canadian labour movement did not communicate an alternative vision of the social order to the rest of Canada, or even to its members, between the 1940s and the 1970s. It had been deeply divided at first by the battle between the CCF and the Communist Party, a battle that ultimately killed the movement's crucial educational institution, the WEA. Thereafter, the industrial unions, in particular, but also the public sector unions, narrowed the focus of their educational activities to tools courses. Rather than a community-wide focus that might convey a broad sense of worker interests, these union-run seminars accepted a systems approach to bargaining and industrial relations. The union movement's exhibits at country fairs, its labour weeks in the local newspapers and at service club luncheons, and its fruitless discussions about a national newspaper, bore witness to its failure to address the changing context of cultural struggle. What is more, the unions failed to create the means of reaching their own members; and they failed to design a media strategy that would ensure the visibility of alternative perspectives. Thus, the conventional wisdom of the continental "information industry" engulfed the hitherto-coherent and relatively-distinct Canadian communications system and relegated unions to the sidelines of broader political and social discussions.

#### *V. Adult education and communications in the Canadian labour movement today*

THE LABOUR JOURNALIST ED FINN has a list of what he calls "my clichés" that say a great deal about the circumstances of organized labour in contemporary Canada. Five of them cropped up in our interview: "You don't need a police state if you can convince people to acquiesce voluntarily"; "labour is losing the war of words and ideas because we haven't the resources, the medium and the words themselves"; "governments can get away with bashing unions because the public believes that unions should be bashed"; "implementation of the neoconservative agenda has been possible because the majority of Canadians don't understand the issues"; and

<sup>53</sup>Dreams of a national progressive newspaper have been discussed at labour and NDP meetings many times in the intervening years. Ron Verzuh, Senior Officer in the Public Relations Department of the Canadian Union of Public Employees, has argued recently that Canadian labour should establish its own national daily newspaper. He suggests that \$1 per month from every union member would provide a capital pool close to \$24 million per year, quite enough to launch such a venture. But the steps from conception to action have never even been attempted. Ed Finn, "Labour and the media," unpublished mss. of speech to Canadian Association of Labour Media, c. 1989, 11-2. The power of an alternative journalistic perspective can be observed by turning to the forty-two (no less) annual volumes of *The Bedside Guardian*, of which the latest, edited by John Course, is for 1993 (Fourth Estate, 1993).

"labour is losing the struggle for the hearts and minds of the Canadian people because none of its strategists is thinking about campaign techniques, campaign resources, or of the changes they should seek in the cultural context of ordinary Canadians."<sup>54</sup>

Ed Finn is not alone in identifying one of the union movement's major problems as the low opinion held by North Americans, of the union as an institution. The International Association of Machinists conducted a survey in 1980 that demonstrated how beleaguered the movement had become.<sup>55</sup> A review of the media treatment of unions in the United States published in 1992 cited dozens of movies which included labour content; with the exception of "Norma Rae," the unionists were invariably depicted as corrupt and violent "bad guys." American television dramas offered little better. Newspaper cartoons and the labour beats of the news pages, let alone the editorial columns, did not view organized labour favourably. The same pattern was repeated in television news.<sup>56</sup>

In a recent article, Finn claimed that "the level of understanding of the labour relations segment of the economy is so abysmally low that there is virtually *nothing* to build on. All that exists in the public perception of unions and their function in the economy are misconceptions and myths. To even *begin* to inculcate a more objective idea of what unions are and what they do will require sweeping changes in our educational system, in the media, and the labour relations system itself."<sup>57</sup> He faults Canadians for being utterly unfamiliar with the labour relations system which shapes so much of their lives. And he notes that, as of 1990, there was not a single full-time labour columnist in Canada. Finn believes that the cultural battleground has altered significantly within the space of one generation. There has been, he writes, a shift in the "relative importance of collective bargaining and communications. ... " A result of this fundamental change is that unions, he says, cannot get by as they once did with the support of "the 5 or 10 per cent who served as local officers and attended union meetings." They require the support of all their members, and their members' families, if they are to influence policy discussions.<sup>58</sup>

The adult education movement has sustained a similar loss of influence in the decades since the 1950s. And yet, on the surface, it has never been more successful. A survey conducted in 1983 noted that nearly one Canadian in five, 19 per cent, took at least one adult education course in that year.<sup>59</sup> But the range of these courses — academic credit, job skills, leisure pursuits, marriage and first aid and prenatal

<sup>54</sup>Ed Finn, interview with author 23 August 1993; also his mss. article for Canadian Association of Labour Media, c. 1993 "We're losing the war of words."

<sup>55</sup>Ron Verzuh, "Why People Hate Unions," mss. review of William J. Puette, *Through Jaundiced Eyes—How the Media View Organized Labor* (Ithaca 1992).

<sup>56</sup>Puette, *Jaundiced Eyes*. I would like to thank Ron Verzuh for this reference.

<sup>57</sup>Ed Finn, untitled mss. of speech to Canadian Association of Labour Media, c. 1980s, 19.

<sup>58</sup>Ed Finn, mss. of speech to Canadian Association of Labour Media, c. 1987, 11-2.

<sup>59</sup>M.S. Devereaux, *One in Every Five: A Survey of Adult Education in Canada* (Ottawa 1985).

and similar limited purposes — conceals the fact that few programs attempt to see the community as a whole. What is more, the courses do not attempt to set out the cultural tool box necessary if citizens are to deal with community issues. One scholar in the field has argued that adult education in Canada is increasingly a service delivered by professionals in an institutional context, often for professionals. The sense of an adult education *movement* has faded. Where it once sought *social* change and greater democracy, it now seeks *individual* improvement, often measured by cash payoffs or career effectiveness.<sup>60</sup> And the idea of addressing workingpeople as a clearly-identifiable group with distinct interests and perspectives has simply disappeared. That loss constitutes one explanation for the crisis of the labour movement.

The circumstances of adult education, union education, and union communications strategies are related. All three have been significantly affected by developments in contemporary culture. Lucy Taksa notes the evolution of Australian labour historians' approach to cultural questions between the 1940s and the 1970s and then introduces the unsettling idea that, in recent years, there has emerged a distinct gap between traditional labour culture and workers' cultural expressions in Australia's post-industrial society.<sup>61</sup> Canada has undergone similar cultural changes. One recent Canadian survey employs such concepts as the "commodification of culture" and "domination through signification" to suggest that "global communications" and the "new information order" have drastically altered "almost every aspect of social existence."<sup>62</sup> Bryan Palmer similarly relies on a cultural argument, Guy Debord's discussion of the culture of spectacle, in his treatment of the Canadian labour movement since the mid-1970s.<sup>63</sup> The spate of publications on such themes demands a response from those who profess an interest in worker education.

The recent literature suggests that workingpeople have lost, or are in danger of losing, a sense of "classness," a consciousness of their power and identity, as a result of changes in culture and communications. The literature also emphasises the relative sophistication of business, as opposed to other groups, in the use of advertising and public relations techniques. It notes the workers' growing problems in securing the highest *quality* of information and even of securing *access* to some sources of information. These problems can be re-phrased to illuminate their relation to adult education: workers may not acquire the conceptual skills to understand and participate effectively in some of the debates about public policy;

<sup>60</sup>Frank Cassidy, "Adult Learning and Citizenship," in Cassidy and Faris, *Choosing Our Future*, 2-10.

<sup>61</sup>Lucy Taksa, "Toil, Struggle and Repose: Oral History and the Exploitation of Labour Culture in Australia," *Mouvement sociale* (Forthcoming 1994).

<sup>62</sup>Peter A. Bruck and Marc Raboy, "The Challenge of Democratic Communication," in Raboy and Bruck, eds., *Communication: for and against democracy* (Montréal 1989), 3-4.

<sup>63</sup>Bryan D. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800-1991*, 2nd ed., (Toronto 1992), 386-92.



they may be provided with second-rate journals and programs (note the rise of infomercials and the decline of the daily newspaper), with which to build their view of the world; they might discover that corporations have privatised the data which are necessary to an informed debate; and, as a result of anti-tax campaigns, they may have to relinquish the inexpensive data and services that had formerly been provided by the great state agencies of library, museum, archive, census and the like.<sup>64</sup>

What do these issues have to do with worker education? A scholar of educational studies, Lauren Resnick, has suggested that students transfer much less from the general, theoretical, widely-usable skills learned in a classroom to their out-of-school work than was previously thought. Thus, she writes, modern societies probably devote too much time to teaching students in a classroom about situation-specific skills rather than carrying out such instruction in the workplace where it would be far more meaningful. However, situation-specific learning is by itself very limiting, according to Resnick, especially when the worker must adjust to a system breakdown or to a change in jobs. Therefore, she concludes, the ratio of "practical" to "formal" learning (the former situation-specific and learned on the job, the latter theoretical and learned in school), and the role of each, must be considered carefully by any society. Within this context, society members must appreciate that the purpose of any school (whether for under-18s, undergraduates, or adult learners), is to provide an opportunity for reason and reflection, for the acquisition of "shared cultural knowledge that permits a population to function as a true society. ..."<sup>65</sup> This sounds to me like an invitation to review the allocation of resources to the different educational systems (elementary, secondary, university, college and technical), to reduce the attention and perhaps the amount of money directed to universities, and to revisit the field of adult education.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>64</sup>Several works in media studies, using variations on reception theories, have asserted the comforting conclusion that "agency" still applies to such contemporary cultural events as watching television. John Fiske writes of "audiencing" and insists that worker or peoples' resistance is alive and well among television audiences. John Fiske, "Audiencing: A cultural studies approach to watching television," (forthcoming) and Fiske, *Television Culture* (London 1987), 62-83. Working from similar concerns, a revisionist study of the "news" asserts that people do learn from their encounters with the media and that television as news source (relative to newspaper and magazine), has been criticised unfairly. I do not disagree with these generalisations but prefer to emphasise that political struggle is unending and cultural debate is always subtle and elusive. Thus, a recent book on news analysis adds an ominous warning to its generally positive conclusions: "it is less important how people want to get their news than *whether* they want to get news." W. Russell Neuman, Marion R. Just, and Ann N. Crigler, *Common Knowledge: News and the Construction of Political Meaning* (Chicago 1992), 115.

<sup>65</sup>Lauren B. Resnick, "Learning in School and Out," *Educational Researcher*, 16/9 (December 1987), 13-9.; I would like to thank Benjamin Levin for his assistance with this literature.

<sup>66</sup>Resnick's work sounds very like the accustomed view of a "liberal tradition" in the print capitalist societies of Europe and of their colonial descendants. But one cannot escape the

Canadians must reconsider their educational system. In this discussion, they must decide whether they are able — and whether they wish — to oppose the centripetal forces of the American-led, market-driven, globalising cultural rhythm. I believe that many Canadians would choose to organise the resistance, local and country-wide and international, that is required if a distinctive conversation and set of priorities is to be maintained. By the same token, I believe that many would be eager to join an international campaign against the contemporary corporation-driven agenda that is now prevailing in so many cultural skirmishes around the world. Only through a more effective workers' education movement can they mobilise a different "social order," an alternative community, that builds on these community-based values.

The foregoing can be seen as a rough three-phase history of Canadian worker education in the twentieth century. In the period from 1900 to the 1930s, uncertainties about the class location of Canada's adult education institutions reflected ambiguities in Canadian thinking about class and a developing contest over its impact on public affairs. In the years between the 1940s and the 1970s, the rise of a "middle" approach to public issues suggested that adult education, through its "citizenship model," would teach Canadians to transcend class divisions. Even the trade union tools courses could be seen as contributing to the harmonious functioning of this society. In the last two decades, Canadians have come face to face with a different problem in adult education: the very existence of their country as a social order of political relevance cannot be taken for granted in the era of an American-led communications revolution, and thus Canada's "national question" anticipates the problems faced by every group that seeks to oppose the trans-national corporate agenda.

Workingpeople, aided by their main institutional voice, the union movement, can be expected to have the interests and the cohesion sufficient to sustain an opposition to this political agenda. To do so, they require the intellectual tools that a proper educational agency can provide. Such an agency could be built on the accustomed ideals of Canadian education and its liberal tradition, including a belief that the quest for truth matters, that debate and ideas are central to social life, and

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fact that the liberal tradition has been under severe criticism from both left and right in recent years for the very good reason that it cannot deliver the value-free, objective perspectives that it has always claimed to do. Rather, liberal education has been used to reinforce existing interests. One of the many recent volumes to make this argument goes on to suggest that a radicalised adult education based on liberal precepts might be desirable in England, because that country still possesses sufficient trade union strength and community coherence for such education schemes (so that a "social purpose orientation" is possible,) but would not be as successful a rallying point in the United States because it lacks a socialist or trade union subculture. [Richard Taylor, Kathleen Rockhill and Roger Fieldhouse, *University Adult Education in England and the USA: A Reappraisal of the Liberal Tradition* (London 1985); for the cultural studies debate, see Stanley Aronowitz, *Roll Over Beethoven* (Wesleyan University Press, 1993).]

that the language in which these discussions are conducted itself must be a principal focus of study.<sup>67</sup> They will also require the assistance of the many agencies established by their predecessors in the hopes of ensuring the vigorous expression of community values as against those of the marketplace, including the CBC, the NFB, the Canada Council, the National Library and National Archives, the scholarly granting agencies, and — who knows — perhaps eventually a peoples' newspaper.

Canada's WEA aimed in the 1930s to communicate "knowledge essential to intelligent and effective citizenship" and to enable workers "to think for themselves and to express their thoughts fluently and correctly."<sup>68</sup> These principles need not be revised substantially. The question for the union and adult education movements is whether Canadian workingpeople will be able to participate effectively in the debate about community priorities — will they possess the specialised language and will they be permitted to enter the forum itself — as their society confronts new cultural circumstances, economic forces, and political battles.

<sup>67</sup>This is drawn from Leonard Kriegel, "Sophocles Comes to the Supermarket: Worker-Students and Higher Education," in *Re-Education* 239-46, and the various discussions of the Canadian WEA cited above.

<sup>68</sup>Peter Sandiford, *et al.*, *Adult Education in Canada: A Survey* (Toronto 1935), ch.4.

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