"Kitchen Economics for the Family:"
Paid Education Leave and The Canadian Autoworkers Union

by

Reuben Roth

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
Department of Sociology and Equity Studies in Education
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
of the University of Toronto

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Abstract

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This thesis examines the Paid Education Leave (PEL) program of the Canadian Autoworkers Union (CAW), formerly the Canadian Region of the United Autoworkers Union (UAW).

This four-week program takes place at the CAW Family Education Centre in Port Elgin, Ontario and potentially provides 90% of the CAW’s members with class-based, union-centred, labour education. Interviews conducted with key CAW sources uncover PEL’s historical roots. A chronicle of the struggle to establish PEL is detailed in relation to the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 140 on Paid Educational Leave. Thematic, oral-history interviews were conducted with six CAW Local 222 members, all former participants of PEL. Interviews are used to illustrate a detailed description of the program’s pedagogy and curriculum. Interview respondents were General Motors (GM) of Canada workers located in Oshawa, Ontario. Several policy and programmatic suggestions are made, including increased understanding of, and elevated respect for, informal learning.
Acknowledgements

Thanks to my family for their support, especially my wife Maureen, without whom I couldn’t have come this far. Not only is she my greatest supporter, but she’s a heck of a copy editor as well, jumping on lapses of logic and grammar alike.

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I am indebted to David Livingstone for his help. He has not only shared his time and insight in abundance, but opened many doors for me. He has also given me an opportunity to delve simultaneously into political action and academia. Jack Quarter has demonstrated that he was a wonderful choice as a member of my thesis committee. He’s always proven to be a keen supporter and a great enthusiast.

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I think [former UAW PEL Director] Dan [Benedict] coined the phrase ... 'kitchen economics' ... we went from very basic beginnings to explaining to people how the system worked and how workers usually get ripped off within that system.

—Gord Wilson, former United Auto Workers Education Director

...what they [management] tend to bring across is that "we want to try and work as a team," but that has absolutely nothing to do with it at all, cause I'm just a number and when I drop dead they'll just bring somebody in and would likely pay them less money in the future ... that's pretty well the way PEL brought across ... that you're just a number and they'll [the company] use you until you rot.

—Paid Education Leave Participant

Capitalism, a true definition of what capital was — that opened up a lot of people's eyes, it really did.

—Paid Education Leave Participant

Chapter 1. Introduction

In the late 1930s I sat in on a course of education for trade unionists. That these workers had a desire to learn was evident by their enrolment in a class held in the evenings, after they had done a day's work. That the teacher knew his subject was manifest from the brilliance of this lecture. That the combination of students' desire and teacher's grasp of the material did not result in learning was obvious from the fact that before the hour was over, several members of the class were asleep...


Huberman was right — many workers do have a desire to learn. Despite the generally negative experience of working-class students in the public education system5 in 1994, over one out of five, or 22 percent of Ontarians classified as 'industrial workers' attended adult or continuing education courses.6 This is likely a response to calls from business and

1Telephone interview with Gord Wilson September 15, 1995.

2Interview PEL05.496

3Interview, PEL06.596.

4Huberman, 1967.


6Livingstone, Hart and Davie, 1995, Table 9.1.
government alike who are demanding ever-more education as a strategy to combat unemployment. Yet, when considering the generally unfavourable initial experience working-class learners undergo, this figure seems remarkably high. Huberman was also accurate about the methods used by many union educators. He makes the point that trade union education should be:

   a vehicle for making the students think, for giving them tools for understanding the world and their position in it.a

Labour education in Canada was, in Huberman’s time, largely (though not exclusively) composed of 'tool courses' of a different kind. These tool courses generally consisted of teaching the necessary, but dry, mechanics of writing and lodging a grievance within the guidelines of their respective collective agreements or shepherding shop floor stewards through the fundamentals of their day-to-day responsibilities — but they did not provide "tools for understanding the world."

It may seem anachronistic to those outside of the labour movement, to examine the structure of a labour education program when the popular notion in North America is that unions are an outmoded institution. Given the current hostile climate for social entitlements previously won, this investigation might appear to be a relative luxury at a time when many social entitlements are fast being withdrawn. But I claim that the positive lessons of a labour education program with a progressive agenda of social justice, equity and working-class

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7 Conversely some claim this is a deception which shifts the blame for high unemployment upon the unemployed.

8 Huberman, (1967: 45).

9 For example see Salutin (1996) or Aronowitz (1990).
history, like that of the Canadian Auto Workers' (CAW)\textsuperscript{10} Paid Education Leave (PEL)\textsuperscript{11} program, may be taken up by other labour organizations in the hopes that the workplace might be the starting venue for an ideological, class-based, counter-hegemonic battle. Gindin writes that:

> the potential of the socialist idea to inspire a more militant working class, never mind the kind of movement that might in turn restore socialism as a serious option, seems lost. At best, the socialist project has been postponed, replaced with a more modest and immediate challenge: Can we at least build and sustain an oppositional base to challenge the capitalism that is marching over us? Can we develop a culture of resistance and struggle — a movement — rich enough to keep alive the possibility of an alternative to capitalism?\textsuperscript{12}

Accordingly, my project is as follows: to uncover a model labour education program which indeed seeks to nurture a "culture of resistance." The Canadian Auto Workers' PEL program, a negotiated four-week adult education course available to 90% of the CAW's 205,000 members, is, at its heart, an attempt to kindle a more radical working-class — as well as one which is supportive of the more counter-capital positions of the CAW. But this is perhaps the program at its most ambitious. PEL has other aspirations as well. Balancing the needs of its members with the CAW’s radical outlook, PEL is a carefully-constructed harmony of both ideological and practical themes.

This study examines a rich area; a progressive labour education program which holds many promising, practical lessons for trade-unions and community organizations alike. In this thesis I hope to make a modest addition to the expanding volumes of labour history which outline the trade union movement's contributions to Canadian society.

\textsuperscript{10}In this paper I use "CAW" rather than the proper form "C.A.W."

\textsuperscript{11}In this essay I choose to use the union vernacular "PEL" (spoken aloud, it rhymes with "well") rather than the proper form P.E.L.

\textsuperscript{12}Gindin (1997: 141).
Included in this impressive list are social entitlements whose origins have been long-forgotten: public pensions, paid vacations, statutory holidays, improved health and safety legislation and other taken-for-granted, workplace-based benefits. It is my hope that this inventory will one day expand to include a paid sabbatical where workers might undertake a nonformal course of critical social and economic study under the rubric of a paid education leave program, or its variant 'skilled development leave'.

Using historical materialist, class-conflict and class-power approaches, I propose to explore the questions, 'what can be learned from the Canadian Auto Worker’s model of Paid Education Leave?' and 'why is Paid Education Leave for workers important today?' In order to move toward an answer to these practical questions, I chart the following course in this thesis: chapter one makes the claim that: 1. PEL has a set of objectives which are explicitly political and lie outside the expected norms of Canadian society in the dominant social and political-economic framework. 2. PEL is a reflection of the CAW’s sharply political ambitions and is symbolic of their broader political and social goals, embodying the aspirations of the union’s leadership for a more egalitarian society in which the present power relations are inverted and; 3. PEL has an explicit class location.

Unlike the historical community-based models of education, which denied the relevance of class lines such as the Antigonish Movement or the Women’s Institute, PEL is firmly grounded in a working-class, ideological frame. This sets it decidedly apart from both state regulated education and corporate-overseen education alike.

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13See The Oshaworker September (1997: 13).

14Curtis et al. (1992).

In chapter two I outline the recent (that is, postwar, with a particular emphasis on the past 30 years) history of European paid education leave programs, including the pivotal role of the International Labour Organization (ILO) in passing Convention 140, which encouraged the formation of paid education leave in those countries which had no such provisions and the extension and formalization of PEL in nations which already had such programs in place.

Chapter three outlines the historic steps taken in the implementation of the Canadian Auto Workers’ negotiated Paid Education Leave program. I sketch the economic and political conditions of the day and I chart the experiences of some of the key players in the making of the CAW program. Unfortunately, the formative role of several of these principal figures has been unacknowledged in other works.⁶

Chapter four surveys the PEL curriculum and pedagogy. I describe the program via an examination of the course text, readings and excerpts of thematically-guided oral history interviews conducted with both former PEL participants and key informants within the CAW leadership. Admittedly, I skirt lightly over areas of the program which encompass tool courses, a subject which has been examined elsewhere.⁷ My interest here lies in the political, cultural and economic spheres of this program. Likewise, for reasons of brevity I will confine myself to the basic four-week PEL program, although the reader should note Table 3 which summarizes some of the CAW’s national, local and joint (union-employer) programs. Additionally, I draw from my own workplace and PEL experiences.

In chapter five I contemplate PEL’s role as a unique labour education strategy within the broader framework of the CAW’s social union strategy. As it is currently practised, PEL

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¹⁶ For example, Saul’s omission of Daniel Benedict’s pivotal role in the formation of PEL.

¹⁷ See for example, Spencer (1994) or Martin (1995).
serves as a model for lifelong workplace education and training in Canada. PEL is a form of political agitation and struggle and presents an expansion as well as an alternative to traditional union tool courses — often the primary form of labour education offered by so-called 'business unions'.

My interest in PEL is not simply academic. It springs from something much more organic. As a PEL participant in 1980-1981 I am also a product of the program. I consider PEL a key, formative influence in my personal history of lifelong learning and a significant learning experience, which redirected my own life course. PEL guided my non-paid work activities within the UAW, later the CAW, as well as my community.

PEL helped me to emerge from a timid, incoherent defense of the dispossessed and opened the route to a staunch support of progressive politics. I discuss this personal turning-point within the framework of Ari Antikainen’s principles of 'significant learning experiences' in chapter five.

It should be noted that while labour education programs like PEL help to build unions, D’Arcy Martin, a leading Canadian labour educator and former United Steelworkers (USWA) and Communications Electrical and Paperworkers (CEP) union education representative, noted that:

([c]onsciousness-raising is a part of what we [labour educators] do, but it is not the final purpose of what we do — that is to win more [economic] power for workers.)

Moreover, while national labour leaders frequently work to raise political consciousness, it is often the trend of local union members and leaders to drift towards trade union economism. Given the strongly ideological nature of many (but not all) of the CAW’s programs, this national leadership cannot be accused of following in the footsteps of simple trade union

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'economics', that is, the 'Gomperian' business-unionist ethic of pursuing mainly economic or working-conditions gains for the union membership, as opposed to less instrumental goals.

The CAW's national leaders have demonstrated a strong commitment to continuing education through the provision of a growing assortment of educational programs. Many CAW programs, often held during weekends at the local union level, are specifically intended to build a cadre of workers concerned with challenging economic and social injustice. The CAW's Education Centre also plays host to members and their families in a relaxed 2-week, 38-hour Family Education program\textsuperscript{19} in the Port Elgin Ontario facility. This program devotes much of its curriculum to an exercise which sees family members invent a union in a playful, cooperative, reenactment. This is intended to 'bring the struggle home' for those who are less familiar with the reasons for, and workings of, a trade union. Moreover, the Port Elgin complex is a "state-of-the-art facility,"\textsuperscript{20} which brings to mind comparisons to corporate retreats. The CAW felt that workers deserve to study in some comfort. The Port Elgin grounds are located in Ontario's wilderness and are famous for its stunning beaches and accommodations. One interviewee said:

PEL ..that was a class six star rating it was excellent place, top of the line and to have that much money involved in something like that and to fly people all over, from one end of Canada to the other, to bring them in, there's a lot of money being involved here..\textsuperscript{21}

Given the laudatory statements noted in worker interviews, this may be one of the more enduring impressions with which PEL participants are left. In 1989, Peter Kennedy declared:

[c]ompleted at a cost of $30 million, the CAW Family Education Centre is one of the

\textsuperscript{19}Benedict (1989).

\textsuperscript{20}Our Times (1997: back cover).

\textsuperscript{21}Interview PEL05.496.
best examples I can think of the union’s educational philosophy. The centre is, first of all, an affirmation that the union plans to be around for a long, long time. It is also a declaration that, by constantly educating the membership and leadership, the CAW will continue to resist the status quo and fight for change.22

The CAW’s family education program also rates a special distinction. For example, Heron noted that:

[t]he autoworkers’ union provides an interesting example of reaching beyond the wage-earner, by integrating entire families into their educational programs at Port Elgin.23

This is a reference to one of the diverse education programs offered by the CAW. Here the CAW attempts to reach beyond their own (traditionally male and white) membership and link with the spouses and children of autoworker families.

My own PEL experience took place before Port Elgin’s $30 million 1989 renovation, when — in an effort to save money — a rather limited menu was served in the Education Centre’s cafeteria and it came to be known informally as "Pork Elgin."

In chapter six I scrutinize the implications of extending a PEL-like program to other workplaces and sites. I conclude that under this schema, working-Canadians could conceivably take advantage of any nonformal course of study which interests them. Workers could, with the help of a Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) scheme, extend their current informal interests into credited courses and eventual certification. A comprehensive paid education leave program would include Canadians not currently participating in paid employment as well.

In my conclusion, I call for the return of a national program of Paid Education or Skilled Development Leave. I strongly suggest a re-examination of the 1983 Learning a

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23Heron (1996: 167).
Living in Canada commission recommendations, for example the use of workplace 'education officers', who would act in much the same capacity as health and safety representatives currently do.

Finally, the reader should note that because of its drastically different (labour) history and development, I leave the formation of Quebec’s labour education program to others who are better versed in that field. Suffice to say that the CAW has been consistently progressive in its adoption of a policy which recognizes Quebec’s right to self-determination. Both internally and externally the CAW has adopted a position which is supportive of this right. The national union, headquartered in Toronto and with a large proportion of its membership concentrated within Southern Ontario, has allowed its Quebec wing a large measure of autonomy.

The CAW: Paragon of Progressive Unionism?

According to Charlotte Yates the historic 1985 separation between the United Auto Workers (UAW) and the CAW can be attributed crucially to the democratic organizational structure of the then-Canadian Region of the UAW, as well as a more class-based, collective identity among its members, and its anti-concessionary economic strategic direction.

In contrast to the UAW, which provided few intermediary structures, a democratically elected Canadian Council is a fundamental internal mechanism which endows a voice and vote to elected rank-and-file delegates. This body both debates and decides the direction of

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\(^{24}\)For example see Heron (1996).


the national leadership and played a pivotal role during the UAW-CAW split. CAW
National representative John McClyment recently wrote that:

The CAW, more than any other union in the country, brings together its top elected local union leaders for national meetings to debate key issues. It’s also the only union where the national president and national secretary-treasurer present a detailed accounting of their work and the union’s activities three times a year.

Here are the ingredients for a transformative organization which works to build resistance to structures of capital and, as Gindin states, a:

mobilization [that] included the hope of more profound change in the nature of society with the workers themselves playing the leading role.

The CAW (and its predecessor the UAW) has historically been a union which is an economic and social trailblazer. Yates wrote that:

[the auto industry and the UAW [United Auto Workers] often broke new ground in their wage and benefit packages, thus paving the way for other unions and companies to follow suit.

It must generally be acknowledged that the Canadian Auto Workers union has had a singular impact on recent Canadian labour history.

The CAW is a union which is a political trend-setter as well. Even a cursory glance at ‘labour beat’ news items over the past year provides many illustrative examples, including the 1996 ‘Big Three’ auto negotiations and the ensuing 21-day General Motors strike (including the Oshawa Fabrication plant occupation), a central, critical role in the bailout agreement of

\[27\] The following section is adapted from Livingstone and Roth (1997).

\[28\] McClyment (1997).


\[31\] An outline of the progressive nature of the CAW is available in Gindin (1995).
Canadian Air Lines International and a major influence in the many regional Social Justice coalitions across Ontario which have been central in leading the mass "Days of Action" protests against Ontario government cutbacks.\textsuperscript{32}

More recently,\textsuperscript{33} the CAW led a successful demonstration against the Liberal government's employment policies at the scheduled opening of the Hibernia oil rig in mid-election campaign. In the ensuing media interviews both Prime Minister Chretien and Newfoundland Premier Brian Tobin angrily singled out CAW President Buzz Hargrove for his central role in organizing the protest. The plant occupation at the PC World Plant\textsuperscript{34} in Toronto is a hallmark of the CAW's militant unionism, especially when contrasted against the long-standing United Steelworkers of America (USWA) strike at the similar S.A. Armstrong plant.

To what can we attribute this exceptional level of 'notoriety' in Canadian political life? Certainly the democratic nature of the CAW is one contributing factor. The fact that the union has historically represented a relatively wealthy — and despite its ups and downs, a comparatively healthy — industry is another key consideration.

That the CAW is a male-dominated union is an additional causal element. But here I suggest that at least a small component of this trade union's success lies in the CAW's education programs, which are of an unrivalled political character in contemporary Canadian trade unionism. The national CAW director for education, Carole Philips, claims that:

\begin{quote}
it might also say something about the militancy of this union versus a number of other affiliates in the Canadian labour movement. It also says something about why in fact,\
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{32}Gindin (1997).

\textsuperscript{33}\textit{The Globe and Mail} May 10, 1997: A10.

\textsuperscript{34}Bourette (1997).
this union has continued to be one of the more militant unions...because of the leadership training programs we've had like Paid Education Leave that plays such a critical role in maintaining that activist base as well. So in fact, it [the move to the political right] may not have eroded our base as severely as other unions because of programs like Paid Education Leave.\(^3^5\)

CAW members' widespread access to its educational programs has helped to build a solid nucleus of support for the CAW’s political action strategies within its own membership.

The CAW is a union which displays a sizable sensitivity to issues of anti-racism and anti-sexism\(^3^6\) especially when one considers the largely male, white, industrial membership at its historical nucleus. The CAW’s bridge-building to marginalized communities is a strong display of a commitment to activist education for sustaining and developing opposition to current social structures. Anti-racist and anti-chauvinist education is a prime feature of PEL.

Moreover the CAW has an explicitly stated goal of 'social unionism', which, according to the CAW Constitution, includes the recognition that:

> [o]ur collective bargaining strength is based on our internal organization and mobilisation, but it is also influenced by the more general climate around us: laws, policies, the economy, and social attitudes. Furthermore, our lives extend beyond collective bargaining and the workplace and we must concern ourselves with issues like housing, taxation, education, medical services, the environment, the international economy. Social unionism means unionism which is rooted in the workplace but understands the importance of participating in, and influencing, the general direction of society [my emphasis].\(^3^7\)

Commenting on the notion of social unionism and the aspirations of this progressive ideology, Martin wrote:

> The goal of social unionism is to make the labour movement into the organizational

\(^3^5\)Telephone interview with Carole Philips, September 1995.

\(^3^6\)See Sugiman (1994).

\(^3^7\)William Knight (1997).
Thus CAW possesses a set of goals which are explicitly political and lie outside the expected norms of Canadian society in the dominant social and political-economic framework. The Paid Education Leave program of the CAW is a clear reflection of these sharply political ambitions. In other words, Paid Education Leave is emblematic of the CAW's broader political and social goals. Simply put, PEL embodies the aspirations of the CAW leadership for a more egalitarian society where the present class-power relations are reversed.

The CAW's Paid Education Leave program, first negotiated at Rockwell Industries in 1977 and established a year later in 1978, is of importance to those who ultimately hope to see an invigorated, state-sponsored, national adult education scheme aimed at working Canadians.

A Different Kind of Common-Sense

In this thesis I use a combination of theoretical frameworks, including Curtis, Livingstone and Smaller's "class power approach" and Lind and Prentice's "different kind of common-sense." Curtis et al. wrote that the:

class-power approach pays more attention than do the abstract structural accounts to the actual class agents involved in the production of discriminatory schooling structures and practices without imputing unconstrained power to the elites in our society ... A completely adequate account would require analyses of discriminatory structures and relations at all levels of the school system, from federal to provincial bodies to that of the interpersonal relationships in the classrooms.

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39 Curtis et al. (1992: 20).
40 Lind and Prentice (1992: 5).
41 Curtis et al. (1992: 20-21).
I use a more unassuming form of this outlook in order to examine the international labour community’s reaction to, and adaptation of, voluntarily mandated educational leave.42

I also be operate within Lind and Prentice’s feminist framework, one in which they assert that they turn common-sense 'on its head' and that:

[c]ritique has an undeservedly bad reputation: it is associated with being negative, picky, pessimistic and unsatisfied. But in the finest tradition of thoughtful analysis, critique is the ability to kick away the props of common-sense to find out what lies beneath the everyday world. In this task, dissatisfaction can be a useful ally. There is much to be dissatisfied with about the current distribution of power and subordination. To be satisfied requires a smug complacency ... Reflection, interpretation, and analysis are the tools we need to figure out what is going on around us. ... once we have peeked beneath common-sense, the world no longer looks divided into closed compartments of...what we take for granted ... Where you stand influences what you see: each location of class, gender, and race influences how the world is experienced.43

My analysis, which springs from my own social location, synthesizes a class outlook, which takes into account the "structures of dominance" and "elite politics" theories, with a probing of social location and critical analysis.44 Warner wrote that: "the starting point for analysis of policy is on one’s own 'taken for granted’ beliefs,"45 and it is this that frames my analysis of the PEL program and the historical circumstances which ushered it in. One of these cornerstone assumed beliefs, institutionalized during the post-1945 period and strengthened in the attack on workers’ organizations during the early and mid-1970s,46 is the consensual model, which is historically related to the postwar-pact between labour and management. In

42Note that the terms "education" and "educational" leave are references to the same program.

43Lind and Prentice (1992: 5-6).

44Curtis et al. (1992: 20).


46See for example Heron (1996) Chapter 5.
our everyday lives we tend to see what Walt Warner called an:

...assumed consensus about ends and how these are to be achieved. Any conflict that may arise over these purposes, or their implementation, is seen as a breakdown in communication, perhaps a lack of adequate planning, or even a sign of ignorance or obstinacy on the part of some individuals. Such misperception or misunderstandings suggest a 'need' for the help of a 'facilitator', a good 'communicator' (as if communication were at the root of all problems), or a 'mediator' whose expertise lies in conflict resolution.\textsuperscript{47}

Warner's essay on consensus and expertise is reminiscent of James Rule's critical piece entitled "The Problem with Social Problems." In his 1971 essay, Rule warns of the unwarranted clinical use of language applied to politics, which he labels as both misleading and dangerous. Of course Rule wrote this in the context of rising regulatory government and union bureaucracies. He suggested that political conflicts can be resolved apolitically, through the detached, cool-headed mediation of qualified, capable experts. This is of course preferable to those whose interests are sympathetic to the status quo, certainly it's more preferable to those within the 'comfortable class' than political action. This way, for example, science and technology can be handed the sticky problems, like pollution, instead of blaming industry and rampant consumerism. Likewise, today everybody knows that poverty is a 'social problem'. Rule said that:

\begin{quote}
[b]y designating disagreeable social conditions as 'social problems', then the experts would have us believe that such conditions are equally deplored by all, like disease or injury.\textsuperscript{48}
\end{quote}

This view would imply that the explanation for the existence of such conditions do not abide in the workings of particular political forces, but through some irrational 'dysfunction' in the political system. This interpretation lends itself to a resolution not by political action but by

\textsuperscript{47} Warner (1987: 240).

\textsuperscript{48} Rule (1971: 51).
the intervention of a technical solution. Rule wrote:

.. by concealing the basic conflicts of interest which give rise to 'social problems', the rhetoric makes it possible to avoid accountability for one's positions. A conflict, after all inescapably requires one to take a stand. A 'problem' on the other hand, is something everyone can be safely against.49

Since the attack on workers' wages and trade unions during the postwar period,50 North American unions traditionally followed the model of advocating on behalf of their members solely on principles of economic-unionism — a carry-over of the now-famous Gompers chant for "more, more, more." This eventually led to a period which witnessed "economic stagnation of the past 25 years."51 The past fifteen years have seen a savage assault on labour "and the result has been labor's complete rout."52 The period which followed witnessed the cooperation of labour with management and heralded the beginning of labour's consent, and some say descent. On this matter Gindin claimed that:

[within labour, one side in the debate has a world-view which supports the kind of unionism that is uncomfortable with membership mobilization. That side argues for realism (modifying expectations) and responsibility (accommodating to the constraints of capitalism).53

In the face of a crisis of survival, workers and managers had been expected to drop their traditional adversarial roles and workers were expected to assume 'co-ownership' responsibilities without reaping the gains of their cooperation. Class-based issues which at one time fell clearly within the sphere of labour-management conflict had been transformed

51M. Yates (1997: 3).
52M. Yates (1997: 3).
into 'matters of concern' for the 'managing partners' of a business enterprise, thus successfully transporting contentious, class-bound questions into managerial ones. Related to this question, but aimed primarily at health and safety issues in eastern Canadian mines, Glasbeek and Tucker noted that:

a central pillar of consensus theory, and the regulatory approaches justified by it, is that labour and capital share a common set of goals. In part, if this is so, it is argued, it is because there is some rough equivalence between them. One aspect of this equivalence is in relation to risk-taking. Employers risk their capital, workers their lives and health. On its face, the notion that these risks are equivalent is absurd.\(^{34}\)

I believe that, as PEL teaches, class conflict remains a key driving force in industrial society.

In *Biology as Ideology*, Richard Lewontin, a biologist and the 1990 Massey lecturer said:

[...some kind of inequality of status, wealth, health and power have been characteristic of every known society. That means that in every known society there has been some form of struggle between those who have and those who have not, between those with social power and those deprived of it. As such struggles occur, institutions are created whose function is to forestall violent struggle by convincing people that the society in which they live is just and fair, or if not just and fair then inevitable, and that it is quite useless to resort to violence or challenge to the status quo. These are institutions of "social legitimation" ... But institutions of legitimation use different weapons — ideological weapons. The battleground is people's heads, and if the battle is to be won on that ground then the peace and tranquillity of society are guaranteed.\(^{35}\)

Rule's argument took place in the afterglow of the New Left movement of the mid-to-late 1960s, and only three years after the 1968 uprisings in Paris. He warned us that the methods used to blunt and quell class (and race and gender-based) divisions was through the use of depoliticizing patently political issues. Along with Warner and Glasbeek and Tucker, Rule revealed the hegemonic workings of the post-1970 downturn at work. As it turns out Rule was largely correct.

It is of some significance that the challenging beliefs examined in this essay are

\(^{34}\)Glasbeek and Tucker (1992: 18).

\(^{35}\)Lewontin (1991: 6).
explored using some of the frameworks I originally learned as a PEL participant in 1980. In other words, my initial lessons in confronting hegemony first took place 'at the knee' of the CAW's Paid Education Leave program.

In 1992, when I entered a university classroom for the first time after many years of blue-collar work, these theorists struck a familiar chord and helped to explain what I instinctively 'felt' about the world I inhabited. However, critique is an unpopular and vastly underappreciated art form. In the 'everyday' world, it is an unquestioned belief that social criticism is akin to a form of paralysis, in other words, not very fruitful. This too, is part of a larger hegemonic process. Lind and Prentice's views serve to counter this widely-held conviction by legitimizing critique and explaining that it is a necessary phase toward the goal of analyzing social relations. Their views grant us the freedom to criticize, which may be an assumed freedom within academia and unappreciated outside it. Lind and Prentice's critique on criticism served as 'permission' for me to pursue a course which intersected with my own interests of work, education and society.

I learned that if we want to question the existing patterns of class, race and gender relationships, we must reverse everyday 'common sense' in order to 'see' beyond our assumed beliefs and then inspect the ideological work which is accomplished, as Lewontin says, "in our heads."

Lewontin reminds us that these inequalities of "status, wealth, health and power" have been represented in "every known society." This fact, combined with Curtis, Livingstone and Smaller's class-power framework, arms us with an analytical tool which allows us to view the relations between, for example, the relatively powerless tripartite labour body, the International Labour Organization, and employers and governments which could choose to ignore ILO conventions with impunity. As a result of this powerlessness, the ILO's goal of
an orderly standard of paid educational practices among the industrialized nations has yet to be realized.

**Methods: Worker Interviews**

In this thesis I include excerpts of thematically-guided oral history interviews conducted with both former PEL participants from CAW Local 222 and key informants within the CAW national leadership during the Fall of 1995 and Spring of 1996. The interview questionnaire, which was aimed at PEL participants, asked a series of open-ended questions about their memories and impressions of their PEL experiences. The questionnaire, which was closely modelled on the Working-Class Learning Strategies (WCLS) interview schedule, was used to build an oral history of the program.

The interviews were conducted primarily in the CAW Local 222 union hall or workers’ homes and were tape-recorded with the permission of the interview respondents. All interview respondents had attended Paid Education Leave in the past five years. I make no widespread empirical allusions as a result of these interviews. The results are only a brief sketch of the experiences of PEL participants intended to provide illustrative examples of a typical PEL experience.

Some weakness should be noted in the respondent samples: the participants are, for the most part, in their thirties, although this is a current reflection of the average PEL participant age, all respondents have a minimum high-school education and with a single

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56 A sketch of Local 222 is provided below.

57 I also include some interview material from the "Working-Class Learning Strategies (WCLS) project," an SSHRC-funded study.

58 Livingstone (1994).
exception, all are male.

**Table 1: Average Female PEL Participation (%)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>% Female</th>
<th>Total N Graduates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>20.1%</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CAW-PEL staff

The gender average of this study's sample, which is 16.6% female, is comparable to the average female PEL participants during the past decade, as recorded in table 1. Of equal interest is the fact that the estimated average female population in the GM Oshawa plant is currently estimated at seven percent.59

The recent amalgamation of several smaller unions, largely within the service industry, has increased the ranks of the CAW's national female membership. Although the CAW is generally thought of largely as a male-dominated trade union, this is a landscape which is currently in flux.60

Several of the participants were directed to me by a local 222 activist, others were contacts I had made while working in the GM Oshawa plant for seven years. The interview participants' relevant social and educational characteristics are outlined in table two below. The formal educational attainment of the interviewees, however, may be an accurate reflection of those who pursue not only PEL, but other forms of nonformal education. It has been

59Personal communication with Local 222 representative Christine Thompson, 1997.

60See membership profile, CAW (1997).
claimed by some, such as Lorimer, in 1931, that:

the more skilled the workers and/or the less manual the occupation, the greater the likelihood that they would take (adult education) courses.

Therefore it may not be surprising to find that those who are most likely to participate in adult education courses like PEL represent a segment of society which has not had a negative school experience. In other words, these PEL participants are not school-leavers. The significance of this lies in the point that early school experience was found to have more weight than occupational category, according to Lorimer's findings. Courtney wrote:

[w]hen schooling was held constant and only those with a high school education or better were compared, there was little difference in educational activity between different occupational types. Therefore, formal schooling seemed to be the determining factor differentiating between groups of high and low educational involvement.

In 1965 Johnstone and Rivera came to a similar conclusion, finding that those adults who participate in nonformal education:

..were younger than the general population: 'Over half were under forty, and nearly four out of five were under fifty'... Second, they were better educated than the general population.

More recently, the CAAE reported that:

The level of prior schooling illustrates this situation well: ten times as many people with university degrees participated (51%) as people with less than 9 years of

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61 In Courtney (1992: 25).
64 In Courtney (1992: 33).
65 According to Livingstone (1997), nonformal education designate part-time organized courses, formal education indicates full-time school programs, while informal learning refers to all other intentional forms of self-directed learning.
schooling (5%). Those with more than 9 years of schooling, but who did not complete the second half of high school also participated at a below-average rate. But as soon as one has a high-school diploma, the situation improves noticeably.\(^{67}\)

The attainment of literacy, and its relation to age, applies directly to PEL participants.

According to Ilene Scott, a member of the PEL staff, the estimated age of participants averages in the "early thirties," although she notes that this is shifting downward and "now we're getting a lot of younger people in their twenties."\(^{68}\)

The International Adult Literacy Survey’s (IALS) analysis of Canadian literacy noted that there is a difference in 'paper and pencil' literacy between those who were formally schooled primarily after World War Two, and those whose education was concluded before this period. They declare that:

\[\text{[i]n large part this represents significant differences in educational attainment. About 40\% of Canadians over 65 have not completed primary school, compared with Canadians aged 26 to 35.}\]\(^{69}\)

Commendably, PEL is currently being reorganized with less emphasis on formal literacy and less reliance on reading text aloud. Future PEL modules are expected to be 'transmitted' via audio tape rather than text.

\[^{67}\text{CAAE (1997: 7).}\]

\[^{68}\text{Ilene Scott, telephone interview, September 1997.}\]

\[^{69}\text{Statistics Canada (1996: 37).}\]
Table 2: Respondent Characteristics and Formal Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I.D. NUMBER</th>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>SENIORITY</th>
<th>EDUCATION</th>
<th>SEX</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PEL01.496</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>13 years</td>
<td>trades/gr.12</td>
<td>male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PEL02.496</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>grade 12</td>
<td>female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PEL03.496</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>B.A. equiv.</td>
<td>male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PEL04.496</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>16 years</td>
<td>grade 12</td>
<td>male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PEL05.496</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>12 years</td>
<td>1 yr. college</td>
<td>male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PEL06.596</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>20 years</td>
<td>grade 13</td>
<td>male</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Local 222: Crucible of Cultural Resistance\(^7^0\)

CAW Local 222 is concentrated at the General Motors in Oshawa, Ontario. Oshawa's complex of General Motors factories, dubbed the 'Autoplex', spans two car assembly plants, a truck plant and a number of fabrication plants. CAW Local 222 represents approximately 24,500 workers in and around Oshawa, including parts suppliers such as Lear Siegler, A.G. Simpson, PPG Duplate; non-automotive workers such as Oshawa Transit bus drivers and of course, GM workers.

Over the past decade, GM management has adopted 'lean manufacturing' techniques which can be characterized as an ultra-Taylorist rationalization of the workplace.\(^7^1\) One Local 222 member made the observation that:

GM is heading to leaner and meaner ... Now they're outsourcing everything ... they're outsourcing all this stuff; there's nothing. So ... when I'm gonna be 50 years old, do you think I'm gonna be on the line? Do you think I'm gonna be able to keep up with the ... young buck? No ... What's out there for me to do? Nothing. I'll have 25 years in there and I won't have a job because they're pushing all these half decent jobs

\(^7^0\)Much of the following section is adapted from Livingstone and Roth (1997).

\(^7^1\)See Wells (1993) and CAW Canada (1993).
The massive January 1995 lineup of 26,000 GM job applicants who desperately wanted to 'share the wealth' enjoyed by current employees was noted in some way by almost every Working-Class Learning Strategies respondent interviewed. One WCLS respondent summarised his own in-plant experience and the almost daily use of the "Pickering army of the unemployed" threat by shop floor management to intimidate workers who fall out of line:

When [workers] complained they were told "hey you don’t like it, there’s 30,000 out there they are just dying to come in."73

Local 222 workers keenly sense their interchangeability and increasing employment insecurity. Employment insecurity related to workplace rationalization efforts, such as lean production, has been a catalyst for increased interest in nonformal education among Canadian autoworkers.74

But GM workers also increasingly feel that their union local is their first line of defence against these threats, and that Local 222 is too big and united on job security issues to be treated with impunity by GM management. These feelings were telegraphed to management during the announcement of GM’s record-breaking 1995 worldwide profits of $6.9 billion U.S.75

GM unintentionally fed employee anger when they distributed celebratory coffee mugs to their unionized assembly workers. The triumphant tone of the mugs, imprinted with the inscription, "On Track...In the Black," was lost on GM’s workforce who calculated the 'true'

72WCLS interview O3ARR2.F96.

73WCLS interview O3ARR2.F96.

74Livingstone and Roth (1997: 7).

75Keenan (1996).
cost of the gift with an uncanny understanding of surplus value. As one Local 222 respondent described the near-universal reaction from workers:

Oh, that’s a $25,000 cup!" If you figure it out, that’s what it is. Well, you take the 6.2 [sic] billion and you split it into the people who get the cup, that’s how much it is ... don’t insult my intelligence ... The reaction was ... everybody was pissed ... everybody ... smashed them [mugs]...just outside of the parking lot.⁷⁶

While smashing a coffee mug may not be a revolutionary act, it is at least indicative of a generalized feeling of being "ripped off".

As in the Hamilton 'Steelworker Family Studies', workers at Local 222 "express logical inconsistencies" and "take contradictory positions" which academics find difficult to explain in terms of theoretical notions of oppositional class consciousness. But the cup smashing incident, the 21-day strike of 1996 and the ensuing plant takeover are indicative of a culture of resistance within this working class community which is comparable to the cultural forms and sentiments that sensitive ethnographers have previously found expressed both within other working-class communities and among working-class kids in school.⁷⁸

These sentiments contributed to the extremely strong support from Local 222 members during the Fall 1996 strike where the issues of job outsourcing and mandatory overtime were the principal issues. The feeling of being "ripped off" probably fostered the GM plant occupation which took place in direct reaction to GM’s threat to remove crucial parts dies from the plant.⁷⁹ As soon as word of the plant occupation spread, Local 222 workers from across Oshawa flocked to the plant gates. Many jumped the plant gate in an act which may

⁷⁶WCLS interview O3ARR2.F96.


baffle outsiders, but is indicative of a unified community culture and economic understanding. The Fabrication plant occupation provides an illustration that there is indeed a world of difference between a comfortable, established society and a transformative community which requires that, on occasion, you step outside society's comfort zone. Of interest is the fact that among the plant occupation’s key participants were several PEL graduates.

The Array of Learning Opportunities at Local 222

The UAW was an early leader in providing labour education programs in Canada. But since the founding of the CAW in 1985, these programs have both deepened and widened substantially. At CAW Local 222, the most diversified educational program is called EDGE (Education, Development, GM-CAW, Employability). This joint management-labour program allows Oshawa workers the opportunity to undertake virtually any nonformal course at area community colleges, school boards and universities, with tuition and books paid for by the company. Participation in this program grew rapidly after its inception in 1993. An EDGE coordinator observed that approximately two-thirds of EDGE participants undertake nonformal courses as a hedge against job loss or in search of supplemental income during retirement.

Anxiety about employment security is the prevailing mood at the Autoplex today — the pursuit of a 'sideline' has long been one of the hallmarks of the more affluent skilled trades workers who often practice their trade outside the plant for personal profit. Many assemblers aspire to join their trades brothers and sisters in sideline work. As a production worker taking a distance education electronics course puts it:


\[81\]Telephone interview with unnamed GM employee, May 1997.
Ever since I started at GM I’ve seen people with their sidelines...they seem to have something to fall back on. For me that’s the important thing. I want that sense of security too.\textsuperscript{82}

For production workers, there is little advantage in demonstrating work-related knowledge, as there is scant chance of advancement on the line. But within the workplace or union, among one’s peers, the multiple opportunities to deepen and display one’s knowledge underline the social fact that this is indeed a ‘learning community.’ However, most of workers’ learning goes on outside of organized courses. A recent Ontario survey has found that industrial workers spend just as much time in both work-related and general interest informal learning activities as do corporate executives and professionals.\textsuperscript{83} The CAW Education Department recognized this fact and said that:

Working people learn from their everyday experiences, from their struggles for dignity and equality, and from their democratic participation in the life of the union at all levels: from local committees to Intra-Corporation Councils, to special conferences to the meetings of the union’s parliament, the CAW Council. The role of the education department is to reinforce this informal education and to build on it.\textsuperscript{84}

But it should also be noted that many 222 members pursue informal learning interests outside of political and labour issues.

Research initiated by Alan Tough\textsuperscript{85} found that people spent a notable amount of time in self-directed, informal learning projects, although the vast bulk of this research examined only middle-class professionals and ignored working-class people. In a survey composed of working-class people, Livingstone found that:

\textsuperscript{82}Wesley Heier quoted in Roth (1994: 24).

\textsuperscript{83}Livingstone, et al. (1997).

\textsuperscript{84}CAW Canada (1996) "How Workers Learn."

\textsuperscript{85}Tough (1979).
...when people are given a few moments to reflect on their work-related learning activities in relation to their other deliberate learning projects, the class-specific patterns change quite dramatically. In common with all prior studies, the amount of learning time identified generally increases with more detailed questioning; in our general and follow-up studies, the average estimates of work-related learning time increase from 4.1 hours per week to 6.5 hours. But the most striking finding from the follow-up interview is that the large difference between workers and higher classes in work-related learning time virtually disappears. According to their own specific estimates, both service workers and industrial workers are devoting at least as much time to learning about work-related issues as most higher classes ... cross-class empirical studies find that working class people, in spite of their limited success in formal schooling, tend to be just as active nonformal and informal continuing learners as those in higher class positions. ... more detailed analyses further suggest that unionized workers are significantly more likely than nonunionized workers to engage in continuing informal work-related learning and that women workers are generally able to spend less time in informal work-related learning than men are.86

Acquiring informal knowledge in the area of computers is perhaps the most prevalent form of collective and individual informal learning.87 As an EDGE participant noted:

I find anything on the computer right now, the way it's going with society, computers, you have to learn them anyways ... It's more just personal. I'm just doing it for my own well-being. It depends what I can learn, how quickly, what courses are available to me, that it isn't going to cost me an arm and a leg to take those courses and that as long as GM's going to offer me courses in computers, I'll take as many as they'll offer. Hopefully I'll learn as many as I can.88

In a further example intended to illustrate the extent of computer learning among Local 222 members, this worker has informally taught himself to:

..run computer programs ... I do it myself. It [the computer] just keeps track of the data ... I got ..two databases, four word processors, two or three spreadsheets.89

There is also an unquestionably rich array of informal, out-of-classroom learning about issues related to labour, ideology and political action among trade unionists. This Local 222


87Sawchuk (1996).

88WCLS interview 06ARR1.M96.

89WCLS interview 09ARR1.A96.
member states that:

I take anything I learn in the labour movement as being an educational ... period. Newspapers, past courses I’ve dug up for article research for ... writing something in The Oshaworker, other people’s collective agreements to see what we need for our locals. I mean, all of that’s kind of informal, I guess, learning.90

Learning about the systemic character of economic and social injustice, beyond but linked to one’s own personal experience, is pivotal for the development of social movement communities. There has been a general failure in advanced industrial societies to recognize the continuing, especially informal, learning among working-class and other exploited or oppressed peoples.

While the EDGE program permits a wide array of subject choices, the CAW’s internal education programs91 generally follow one of two paths: local education committees design and deliver 'tool-based' weekend or evening courses, which encompass instrumental matters such as committee-person training, grievance procedures, collective bargaining, arbitration, Time Study, Employment Insurance, Workers’ Compensation, health and safety and provincial labour legislation. A joint 'Pre-Retirement Course' is peer-taught at Local 222 and generally aimed at members and, where applicable, their non-CAW spouses. There are also some legislated joint Health and Safety courses.92 Then there are programs which seek to develop a social union core, for example: workplace change and competitiveness, unions and politics, human rights, the legislative agenda of provincial governments, empowering workers of colour, and womens’ activism, among others. A partial list is included in Table 3 below.

90WCLS interview O2ARR2T.J96.

91CAW Canada (1997).

92The Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) program is one such course. On a relevant note, I co-taught WHMIS on a rotating basis while on the GM assembly line for 2½ years.
Table 3: Some Union Local, National and Joint Nonformal Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local weekend seminars</th>
<th>National programs$^{93}$</th>
<th>Joint program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Steward Training</td>
<td>Paid Education Leave</td>
<td>EDGE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Safety</td>
<td>Human Rights</td>
<td>Pre-Retirement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplace Change</td>
<td>Health and Safety</td>
<td>WHMIS$^{94}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legislative Agenda</td>
<td>Environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Activism</td>
<td>Worker’s Compensation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grievance Procedures</td>
<td>Work Reorganization</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective Bargaining</td>
<td>Substance Abuse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workers’ Compensation</td>
<td>Bargaining Issues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Study</td>
<td>Steward Training</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Rights</td>
<td>Women’s Issues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy (BEST)$^{95}$</td>
<td>Employment Insurance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment Insurance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: CAW Contact, The Oshawa\r

Note that there are other labour-education courses available at the federal level through the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), the provincial labour bodies across Canada and the local regional labour councils.$^{96}$

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$^{93}$With the exception of PEL, all national CAW programs are one to two weeks in duration.

$^{94}$WHMIS is a federally-mandated workplace chemical and safety awareness program.

$^{95}$Basic Education for Skills Training (BEST) is the largest literacy program of any kind in Canada. It is coordinated by the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL).

$^{96}$See Martin (1997).
Learning Experiences at Local 222

CAW Local 222 members' general learning motives run the gamut. While many pursue courses which address their current job insecurity and the search for "something to fall back on," others, interested in election to a union office, feel that a union-sponsored course, on Workers' Compensation for example, provides a necessary qualification. Several WCLS respondents also mentioned a variety of broader social interests, including greater political awareness.

PEL's revolutionizing potential is apparent when participants' observations of once-unquestioned daily experiences take on a newly-critical hue. For example, this local 222 worker discusses her understanding of newspapers as shaped by her PEL experience. Given the level of sophistication she displays, it would be difficult to deny the transformative potential of this CAW program.

I don't look at the paper in the same way that I used to ... when they were talking about media ... like The Toronto Sun and the Toronto Star and the differences between the writers and their columns and stuff and how they ... leave things out, you know they edit it to make it a certain way so you're not really told the true story. And it was kind of interesting 'cause ... some people read the paper like it's gospel, now you look at it and you go "no, that's not true," they're contradicting themselves from like last week or the week before, or one reporter's saying something different from the other one.97

Given this statement, it appears that PEL participants are not conforming to the hegemonized stereotype in which members of the working-class are often cast.98 Evidence here also suggests that Oshawa autoworkers' enduring commitment to informal learning, their growing involvement in organized union courses and their continuing participation in political education programs like PEL are helping to build a grassroots, working-class membership

97PEL interview PEL02.496.

98See for example, Bowles and Gintis (1976) or Sennet and Cobb (1972).
with transformative potential. As another 222 PEL graduate said:

[T]he way it [PEL] really contributes ... would be the ...idea of humanity that I try to show to the people that I work with. Since Scarborough [Van Plant, part of CAW local 303] closed we have a lot of er, minority cultures ... I try to openly show them some kind of a welcome. ... [T]hat's another thing from PEL too, I tended to.. 'all trade unionists are the same,' so I ended up spending some time on the [GM-Suzuki] Ingersoll picketline, I talked with those ... people, and I dropped into Scarborough [van plant demonstration] because it was a labour strife issue and I felt I should — I wanted to be there ... I sort of have this ..sympathy, I guess..no, it wouldn't be sympathy, I just sort of feel for these guys. They've been jerked around by a corporation that's making a lot of money and there's no reason for it ... I can't see the underdog go like that.99

The motivation for participating in PEL varies greatly, but the experiences of many Local 222 members generally contribute to building a critical learning community. In Farewell to the Factory, Milkman appropriately titled a chapter "Prisoners of Prosperity: Autoworkers in the Postwar Period." She said that:

[t]he metaphor of imprisonment was central to the self-conception of most GM workers [in part] because they hated their jobs so intensely.100

This too, is another overlooked reason for PEL attendance. Based on my industrial workplace experience, assembly workers will do virtually anything to get off the assembly line, and much of the underlying lure of both PEL and union activity is to avoid the mind-numbing repetitiveness of the line.

As an undergraduate student pursuing the study of sociology, I encountered some inaccurate descriptions of life on the factory floor and I saw autoworkers portrayed in a way I often did not recognize. In an attempt to overcome this gap, some more 'enlightened' university professors resorted to using the ribald, light-hearted book Rivethead: Tales from the Assembly Line (1992) by American autoworker Ben Hamper. This text was presumably

99PEL interview PEL04.496.

100Milkman (1997: 43).
used in an attempt to portray a more accurate reflection of life on the line.

My fear is that many who read these selective accounts of the factory experience will confuse Hamper’s humour, which is an expressive release from the day-to-day drudgery of repetitive, alienated work, as an accurate reflection of that kind of life. It is not. There exists a madness of sorts on the auto assembly line. In order to relieve the frustration and tension I experienced, I would sometimes join others and, in what no doubt appears to the outsider as an inane ritual, we would smash our hydraulic power-tools against the heavy steel track of the line and howl as loud as possible in an unbridled way.

In a journal entry written almost a decade after the event, I described my own initiation to auto assembly work in 1984 as follows:

I broke down on only my second day on the job at General Motors. I just slumped down and sat on the filthy floor among the metal shavings and the deafening noise of the grinding booth where I had been assigned. J. — a large, friendly Acadian who had started at GM only a few years earlier — was attempting to show me the finer points of grinding a bronze seam on the roof of the Chevrolet Celebrities zooming by at a terrifying, maddening speed. I knew there was no way I could do this job. I would fail my three-day probation and be turned out, jobless, onto the street. Or I may have been afraid that I would actually succeed and be condemned to this job for the rest of my working life — perhaps both. -Journal, October, 22, 1993.

Life as an auto assembler verges on madness for many and Milkman’s imprisonment metaphor has hit upon what few commentators have. Assembly line work is alienating, inhuman and degrading, to be sure, and workers will sometimes leave the line for a period of time in order to regain their composure. Sometimes these breaks are taken under the auspices of Workers’ Compensation and at other times these intermissions are granted via the opportunity which PEL, or other forms of union leave, present. This logic cannot be discounted when looking for an initial motivator for attending PEL.

But motivation is, of course, a package with multiple elements. As a PEL participant, initially drawn to the course by his interest in health and safety issues, recalls:
Back when I was [working] in [the] hazardous materials [department] I never understood how I could be seeing all these things going on with chemicals, and here's health and safety people doing nothing about it. Entire departments have cancer because of bull...bullshit and how could you people not notice? And I wanted to get the training, and a guy by the name of _____, I was badgerin' him, everybody ... where could I get health and safety training? And he mentioned: "Well, have you ever heard of PEL?"101

Another Local 222 worker explains how he heard of the PEL program:

I just heard through the talk on the floor, and committeeperson that there was education leave and anybody could apply, so that's why I put my name in ... I thought it'd be how the locals would run, what they face against the works of GM and their strategies and how they could combat back and forth. And I thought it would mainly be for help mainly on the local floor ... Safety-wise, human-rights wise, things like that.102

Another interview respondent explained that his involvement in a Local 222 course brought him word of PEL:

I'd been on human rights courses at the union hall and ... [kept] hearing about paid education.103

The multiplicity of union-sponsored courses at this, Canada's largest union local, sees workers leaping from one nonformal course to another. It is this relative embarrassment of labour-educational riches which, when compared to the limited options at other, less-wealthy unions, makes Local 222 a veritable 'Mecca' of sorts.

A Brief Review of the Literature

It is no exaggeration to say there is little research on the CAW's Paid Education Leave

101Interview PEL06.596.
102Interview PEL05.496.
103Interview PEL01.496.
program. Gindin\textsuperscript{104} highlights PEL's objectives in his authoritative history of the CAW, while labour historians Craig Heron\textsuperscript{105} and Brian Palmer's\textsuperscript{106} sweeping chronicles of the Canadian labour movement record PEL in a fleeting manner. Yates\textsuperscript{107} detailed chronology of postwar automotive union history makes particular note of the UAW Canadian region's strategic direction in the 1970s and she noted that:

The Canadian UAW's educational network, especially after paid education leave was won in 1979, and greater national control over newspapers and research further helped in mobilizing autoworkers.\textsuperscript{108}

However, Yates does not focus on PEL at any length.

One of the few pieces of in-depth scholarly work\textsuperscript{109} on the subject of PEL, Nick Saul's Master's thesis entitled "'Organizing the Organized': The Canadian Auto Workers' Paid Educational Leave Programme,"\textsuperscript{110} examines the PEL program within the context of global competition and post-1970s restructuring. Saul considers the challenges that unions face, not only to organize those who are outside the labour movement, but the difficulties confronted in attempting to consolidate and conduct political agitation among current union members. Saul's 1994 paper is largely a descriptive exposition and, although he accomplishes a laudatory amount within relatively few pages, he nonetheless maintains a distant view of the program. Moreover Saul makes some sweeping assertions based on little empirical data. For

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item Gindin (1995).
\item Heron (1996).
\item Palmer (1983).
\item C. Yates (1993).
\item C. Yates (1993: 230).
\item See also Spencer (1994).
\item Saul (1994).
\end{itemize}
example he creates three arbitrary groups of participant enthusiasm and assigns each category a statistical proportion of the total PEL population, as follows:

The first group consists of those students who are genuine trade union activists before the PEL course begins ... Perhaps, roughly speaking, fifteen per cent of the PEL students could be placed in this group" ... The second group is by far the largest of the three (one might estimate as many as eighty per cent falling in this category). For these people the PEL programme is an "eye opening" and even shocking experience as many of them are being pushed to grapple with matters that they rarely think about ... a third group represents about perhaps no more than five per cent of the PEL population. This small group is at PEL to party.\textsuperscript{111}

Though these may well be accurate appraisals, Saul neglects to inform the reader what the source of his statistical values are. To be perfectly candid, Saul's distance from the program shows: he has a only a cursory familiarity with PEL, his description is too general, he records few worker impressions (which are not verbatim) and the reader is given little background on the vast array of available CAW programs. Saul romanticizes both the CAW and its members, offering little constructive criticism of the program.

However, given the unique and progressive nature of PEL, it is altogether too easy to become a CAW 'convert'. I hope to rectify some of these shortcomings by adding my own insight as an attendee of PEL during its second-ever session, in 1980-81. I also have the advantage of being a UAW-CAW member over the course of two jobs, from 1980-1997. In fact I still maintain my CAW membership today and I remain in contact with many Local 222 members in my adopted city of Oshawa. This gives me the benefit of viewing the course and its participants from "the inside" of the union and the labour movement.

Let me point out that in my praise of a union with which I have had a seventeen-year association, I am not merely being a CAW chauvinist. The autoworker union's renown for its

\textsuperscript{111}Saul (1994: 31-2).
progressive political actions and policy interventions, both in and outside the auto industry, extends beyond the immediate interests of its own membership. As current CAW President, Buzz Hargrove has declared:

Capitalism defines freedom in terms of market freedoms, freedoms based on the power that capitalists have in the marketplace. But those "freedoms" increasingly stand in the way of a different kind of freedom, a freedom based on the ability of everybody to develop their potential and all dimensions of their lives. When the two clash, we have to make a choice.

In a forthcoming history of labour education, Martin tells us that the CAW's Family Education Centre is "one of the finest adult education facilities in the country."

Aronowitz: Three Models of Worker-Education

Former union organizer for both the Amalgamated Clothing Workers and the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers, Stanley Aronowitz, suggested that there are:

three concurrent, although historically situated models of worker education: the ideological, instrumental and service models.

According to Aronowitz, the ideological model parallels the historical period in labour history when those involved in the formation of trade unions in Canada and the U.S. were under siege. This is the era which stretched from the 1920s until the late 1930s. This was a time

\[^{112}\text{See for example the Globe and Mail story on Hibernia demonstration (cited below).}\]

\[^{113}\text{See for example Globe and Mail, May 10, 1997.}\]

\[^{114}\text{See CAW Canada, PEL Manual, Vol. IV. "Coalitions and Alternatives and CAW Social Action Groups."}\]

\[^{115}\text{Hargrove (1994).}\]

\[^{116}\text{Martin in Our Times (1997: 61).}\]

\[^{117}\text{Aronowitz in London et al. (1990: 22).}\]
when the "general environment was least favourable to the formation of stable unions" and strike activity was the favourable tactic, easily chosen over compromise between parties. Additionally, labour's bureaucracy was relatively underdeveloped and the contrast between officers and rank-and-file members was less pronounced. Labour education efforts were aimed at literacy classes which aspired to elevate the general and cultural education of the membership and union-sponsored classes which acquainted participants with the cornerstones of "world literature, philosophy, and the 'classics' of socialist thought, particularly Marx, Engels, and Kautsky," among others.

The New Deal era brought a measure of labour peace to both sides of the Canada-U.S. border. Palmer wrote that around this time membership in the Canadian Trades and Labour Congress soared from 160,378 in 1938 to 360,000 in 1946. However, this was also a period which included such labour milestones as the upsurge of CIO organization and the rise of Communist Party-backed unions, such as the United Electrical and Mine Mill unions.

In short, union bureaucracies were growing and in order to accommodate the new realities of the 'postwar pact'. Yates, Heron, Palmer and others refer to the 'postwar pact' as the historic accommodation between labour and management. Labour unions were recognized by legislation as the sole representatives of their members, while management would have full say over the production process without interference from labour.

Milkman writes that Reuther's signing of the 1950 UAW-GM "Treaty of Detroit" was

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118 Aronowitz in London et al. (1990: 23).
119 Aronowitz in London et al. (1990: 23).
120 Palmer (1993: 238).
121 For an overview of this period, see Palmer (1993) Chapter 6 or Heron (1996) Chapter 2.
a key event which ushered in an era of labour-management serenity and lasted until the late 1970s.\(^{122}\) This new labour orientation ushered in what Aronowitz referred to as the "instrumental model of union education."\(^{123}\) This paradigm seeks to equip the burgeoning union bureaucracy with the technical and strategic tools for negotiating and enforcing the union-management contract. In this period:

union leadership [became] nearly identical with contract administration."\(^{124}\)

As demonstrated by Aronowitz, the 'service model' of worker education was a response to the growth of public sector unions in the post-1960s. In this model:

unions offer a wide variety of educational programs, most of which aim to improve the mobility chances of individual members.\(^{125}\)

This individual, instrumental mode of worker-training (as opposed to collective, ideological, worker-education) includes employment training and retraining for upgrading in order to advance the members' credentials, mobility and income. Aronowitz wrote that:

[the service model of unionism and education may be understood as a legitimating function for a leadership that sees itself, and is increasingly viewed by the membership, as a mediator and administrator as much as a representative of membership demands upon employees.\(^ {126}\)]

The Local 222 EDGE program, discussed earlier, fits neatly into this category. Moreover, Aronowitz's comments on the nature and outlook of the service model of trade unionism corresponds to the way in which Local 222 members and leadership view one

\(^{122}\)Milkman (1997: 22).

\(^{123}\)Aronowitz in London et al. (1990: 26).

\(^{124}\)Aronowitz in London et al. (1990: 26).

\(^{125}\)Aronowitz in London et al. (1990: 27).

\(^{126}\)Aronowitz in London et al. (1990: 28).
another. Local 222 members go to 'the (union) hall' when they brush against management authority, as in the case of a discipline issue; or when they 'butt heads' with state regulatory agencies, such as Employment Insurance or Workers' Compensation.

Members confer with their 'service representatives’ who are 'experts' in their field and toil full-time to resolve members’ problems. These service reps deal with individual 'case files' in much the same way that social service agencies perform their duties. However, in the democratic spirit of trade unionism, the membership has the opportunity to elect their service representatives for a two-year term.127

The CAW’s Paid Education Leave program conforms to Aronowitz’s ideological labour-education model. Later, in chapter two, we shall see that using the International Labour Organization criteria, PEL fits within "workers’ organization training." Thus, PEL is union centred, ideological education.

The Hidden Injuries of Public Education

That the Canadian Auto Workers undertakes this kind of education at all bespeaks a 'problem’ within public education. Obviously those responsible for the inception and curriculum programming of PEL feel the education that working-class, school-age children undergo is lacking in some areas. One PEL discussion topic reads in part as follows:

Ever since the Industrial Revolution, schools in capitalist societies have been assigned a particular role: the maintenance and reproduction of capitalism and the values on which it depends.128

127 The array of elected service reps at Local 222 includes: Pension reps; service reps who deal with WCB, Employment Insurance, Supplemental Unemployment Benefits and negotiated health plan benefits; employee counsellors and health and safety reps, among others.

PEL seeks in part to question the role of the public education system in Bowles and Gintis' neo-Marxian framework. The socializing role of schools in a capitalist society is fodder for discussion in PEL curriculum material which makes the claim that:

[w]e experienced a system that was designed to maintain, promote and advance those who begin from a position of privilege ... your parents' socio-economic background, not your abilities or your educational qualifications, is the most important factor determining your 'success' in the educational system and in the job market ... Our school system operates against the interest of the children of working people.\(^{129}\)

While this is hardly news to educational activists and academics, it is a revelation to CAW members who have never been exposed to critical material or discussion of this kind. This is merely one illustration of PEL's attempts to work against the hegemonic character of public schools.

Writing about the socializing character of American public schools, Antonia Darder explained that their curriculum texts and materials are used to "support the values of the dominant culture,"\(^{131}\) including the following themes:

(1) an overvaluing of social harmony, social compromise, and political consensus, with very little said about social struggle or class conflict; (2) an intense nationalism and chauvinism; (3) a near-exclusion of labour history; and (4) a number of myths regarding the nature of political, economic, and social life.\(^{132}\)

Here I am interested in Darder's third theme, the "exclusion of labour history," a subject covered in no small amount of depth during the four-week PEL classes.

Toronto history teacher Bob Davis, who called for a complete rewrite of how history is taught in public schools, enunciated the 'missing labour history' problem in a wonderfully

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\(^{129}\)Bowles and Gintis (1976).

\(^{130}\)Quote from J. Davis et al. (1989) in PEL Program Pre-Session (1996: 6).

\(^{131}\)Darder (1991: 21).

\(^{132}\)Darder (1991: 21).
translucent manner. Here are two relevant excerpts:

The dignity of ordinary lives and work. If you spend most of your historical study learning about famous missionaries, explorers, kings and queens, politicians, financiers, writers and inventors, you pick up the message that the life of the average person is unimportant ... The union movement is a central part of the story. The best known working-class organization is the union. The union movement is central to the struggle by working-people for a decent life. Certainly this movement has its weaknesses, but to have it pop in and out of history or be absent altogether, the way it usually is, is a distortion of history.\(^\text{133}\)

Indeed what labour history does remain in the classroom seems quaint and somewhat out of place in a so-called information age brimming with shiny new technology. To even the most aloof observer, labour appears to be hopelessly overpowered by the corporate business class.

In an example of the unequal oppositions at play, the two parties — often portrayed in the popular media as equals — are spoken of in the following manner: On the one hand we have high-technology, while on the other industrial workers represent a debased manual labour.

Moreover, on the one hand we have a global high-risk, high-stakes economy, while on the other hand industrial workers are characterized as 'coddled' by the dual comforts of a union contract and government social programs.

In an example of the above characterization, McQuaig\(^\text{134}\) recounted how self-described venture capitalist and social commentator Anthony Hampson, a former CEO of Canada Development Corporation, painted an unflattering portrait of the "old" Canadian psyche. Hampson wrote that:

Many historians and sociologists agree Canada is a nation of losers, with all the bad attitudes losers usually develop — a sense of entitlement, a tendency to freeload, a reluctance to change and an inability to face both reality and their own

\(^{133}\)Davis (1989: 59-61).

\(^{134}\)McQuaig (1992).
Labour and labour history, with its emphasis on conflicts, heroes and villains, most of whom are today long-forgotten, seem out of place in the sleek world of monied bondsmen and information technology. No doubt Hampson fits into the world of the "comfortable majority" and Gord Wilson, the former UAW Education Director, does not.

In J. Davis et al., Wilson recounted his own school experiences while growing up in London, Ontario. His Catholic school was located in a largely middle class neighbourhood. Here he was but one of a handful of working-class students who clearly:

..were different, very different from the comfortable majority, which surrounded us. We were an economic minority, and didn’t receive much encouragement to pursue academic endeavours in the school. In fact, they hardly recognized we were there. They had to deal with us, of course, but nobody got very excited about our presence. Mostly, it seems to me, they looked through us.\textsuperscript{136}

Wilson’s 'invisibility' or marginalization, as one of a clutch of working-class, Catholic children in a middle class district, is not an experience far removed from the peripheral nature of industrial workers in our society. But Wilson’s "difference" is more than simply a category, it is a relation. "Difference" according to Naomi Norquay is:

..shaped and limited by..location in the mainstream...I am learning that \textit{difference is never simply a descriptive term; it always signifies a social relation of domination/subordination, reproduction/resistance} [my emphasis]. Differences do not simply exist; they are constructed and all constructions of difference are integral to power relationships.\textsuperscript{137}

Thus it might be argued that both Wilson’s — and the working-class’ — inferior sense of

\textsuperscript{135}McQuaig (102: 1992).

\textsuperscript{136}Wilson in J. Davis et al. (1989: 11).

\textsuperscript{137}Norquay (1993: 241-251).
'inappropriate fit' is not accidental, nor is it pathological, as some claim.\footnote{Curtis et al. (1992).} This unease is a socially-constructed, ideologically-driven, class-based relationship which is produced under a certain set of conditions under capital. Hopefully this socially-distorted relationship can be dismantled by counter-hegemonic means such as those of the Paid Education Leave program.
Chapter 2. The International Labour Organization and PEL

According to Adams, Draper and Ducharme, the matter of paid education leave had been debated by the International Labour Organization, the international body which establishes labour standards, since the late 1950s. A policy on vocational training, designated recommendation #117, was adopted in 1962, and specified that:

...undertakings not in a position to furnish their trainees with all the theoretical and practical knowledge required for a particular occupation should as necessary ... arrange for the deficiency to be made up in training institutions.

Finally, after a period of deliberation which lasted from 1967 to 1974, the ILO called for a national paid education leave program to be adopted by its member-nations. PEL was defined by the ILO as:

[1]eave granted to a worker for educational purposes for a specific period during working hours, with adequate financial entitlements.

The objective of the paid educational leave policy, designated ILO Convention 140, was that:

[each Member [nation] shall formulate and apply a policy designed to promote, by methods appropriate to national conditions and practice and by stages as necessary, the granting of paid educational leave for the purpose of — (a) training at any level; (b) general, social and civic education; (c) trade union education.

According to the ILO, PEL was to be funded "in accordance with the national practice" and with contributions expected from the following parties, in accordance with their respective obligations:

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139 In Adams, et al. (1979).
140 Adams et al. (1979: 1).
141 Adams et al. (1979: 1).
142 CERI (1975: 220).
143 CERI (1975: 220).
(a) employers, collectively or individually, (b) public authorities and educational or training institutions or bodies, and (c) employers’ and workers’ organisations.144

The 1976 CERI report titled Developments in Educational Leaves of Absence, assessed PEL a mere two years after the ratification of ILO Convention 140 and expressed the view that:

[...]educational leave of absence, which is becoming increasingly widespread in many countries, is an important and even essential factor in enabling adults to exercise their right to education.145

According to this OECD-backed report, two factors were at play, primarily in Europe. First, PEL had not only established itself but was becoming more prevalent in European nations and second, PEL was an important catalyst in the expansion of adult education. The CERI report noted that:

[...]he right to educational leave and the way the exercise of that right is organised is different in quality from other social rights such as paid holidays, sickness insurance, retirement schemes and so on. By including it in their catalogue of demands, the trade unions are diversifying their strategy and taking the qualitative features of life on the job into consideration.146

According to this report paid educational leave had been pursued on two fronts: as a collective bargaining demand and as a national policy on adult education. Caldwell concurred and wrote that:

[s]ome reference should be made to the other types of personal leave, such as sick leave, recreational leave and long service leave, all of which have been accepted and institutionalized within the industrial, work and legal worlds. It is, of course, possible that paid education leave could be added to this range of personal work rights.147

This last statement explains, in part, the origins of the call for support of paid educational

144CERI (1975: 227).
145CERI (1976: 9).
146CERI (1976: 95).
147Caldwell (1979: 1-2).
leave by the ILO in 1974. The ILO’s 1974 Convention 140 was finally struck after much
discussion dating back to the early 1960s. The conditions surrounding the initial call for PEL
might be considered a continuing component of the 'great postwar compromise' between
management and labour.

The intervening years of discussion were crucial ones, in economic terms. By 1974,
the postwar boom had largely ended and the West now boasted a comparatively stagnant
economy. For example, the American Michael Yates wrote that:

[as long as the economy grew rapidly, organized labour secured better conditions for
union members ... However when the long expansion ended in the early 1970s, the
chickens came home to roost. Labor could not withstand capital’s onslaught, and it
could not muster allies in government or in the larger society.]

Additionaly, in "The Working-Class goes to College," Ira Shor refers to this period after the
postwar boom as the period which ushered-in community colleges in (North) America.
According to Shor college education should be viewed as a mechanism which turned workers
into students. Shor writes that:

[m]ass higher education is thus a unique device for handling the glut of unsellable
goods and unemployable people ... [m]ass higher education is a creative response to
the ineradicable problem of surplus under capitalism.

It seems that PEL’s unfortunate demise outside of Europe, where it had not yet had the
opportunity to take root, was largely a matter of poor historical-economic timing.

The European View: Sweden

Generally speaking, in the decade since ILO 140, Europe’s national educational leave
programs had survived intact. According to Thomas:

\footnote{M. Yates (1997: 10-11).}
\footnote{Schor (1980: 5).}
Sweden, Belgium, France and four states of West Germany have legislated the right to skill development leave. Other countries have developed schemes of leave based on collective bargaining, for example Italy and the United Kingdom.150

However, Sweden's social-democratic history gave it an advantage other European nations lacked. Before 1940, the Swedish union federations had:

.. established educational associations to provide general and union courses to adults. Prior to 1970 many local unions had negotiated educational leave arrangements for trade union education.151

According to Thomas, European labour leaders had the distinction of additional leave provisions. He noted in 1983 that:

[All European countries make some provision for skill development leave for officers of labour organizations.152

Moreover, "where no collective agreement existed, leave was often granted by employers on an ad hoc basis..."153 But three decades later, the Swedish trade unions had made educational leave a negotiating priority and:

in 1970 the establishment of a formal and universal right to educational leave became part of the bargaining agenda of the unions.154

During the 1970s, a series of educational leave laws were passed, including: The Swedish Lessons Act, aimed at immigrants, who could access up to 240 hours of employer-paid work leave primarily in order to study Swedish.

The Shop Stewards Act, aimed primarily at union representatives, relied primarily on

150Thomas (1983a: 8).


collective agreements to establish the hours and frequency of educational leave. Courses covered by this statute trained shop stewards as to their duties and responsibilities in the workplace.

The most inclusive of the Swedish educational leave laws was The General Educational Leave Act. This act allowed workers with a minimum of six months’ seniority to study general, vocational or trade union subjects. Levine wrote that this 1975 statute was designed in correspondence with ILO 140 and was revamped in 1976 and 1982. The Swedish General Educational Leave Act:

"...asserts the legal right of employees to educational leaves of absence but relies on the collective bargaining process to spell out the forms and conditions of educational leave." However, Levine argued that the Swedish law was hampered by the exclusion of:

"...the right to educational leave...the social benefits to be provided during leave...measures aimed at stimulating adult education..."

Also omitted from Swedish legislation was a division of the respective responsibilities of employers and unions, a matter which must be bargained-for in each individual workplace.

Finally in a 1985 overview, Thomas singled out Sweden as one of a number of nations which intervened on behalf of "selected groups, in terms of providing incentives for them to avail themselves of some form of PEL." One can only presume that this was an attempt

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156 Levine (1977: 26).
158 Levine (1977: 26-7).
159 Levine (1977: 27).
to counteract the trend of those with a solid background in formal education getting the most of paid educational leave.

France

On the other hand, French employers and trade unionists negotiated their educational leave legislation without the Swedish compromises. France's 'Law of 1971', initiated "partly in response to the social upheavals of the late 1960s,"161 came about as a result of "the agreement of Grenelle (signed on May 26, 1968) which was made in order to resolve the social crisis,"162 and guaranteed paid educational leave as a worker's right "subject to few limits."163 An employer's levy of two percent of wages164 covered the cost of the educational leave, while an "interministerial committee governs national policy and interagency concerns."165 Schuller wrote the:

...1971 law on Formation Continue was with some justification hailed as a milestone in the history of PEL, a piece of legislation with national coverage establishing rights to PEL.166

The French legislation, which was revamped following the election of the Socialist government in 1981, granted educational leave to individuals of up to one year full-time or 1,200 hours on a part time basis.167 The funding for this scheme was again covered by

164Levine (1977: 14).
165Levine (1977: 14).
166Schuller (1990: 186).
employer surcharges, combined with government funding and regulated jointly. The 1982 Act split the individual right from the bulk of paid educational leave, strengthening individual, rather than professional, leave. The CIF (*Conge Individuel de Formation*) measures were designed to bolster joint worker-employer cooperation, according to Schuller:

[The *lois Auroux*, named after the Minister of Labour of the time, were designed to promote worker participation in company decision-making by introducing new rights to information and new modes of representation ... [t]here was to be a growth of *concertation* or joint agreement on the company's training programme...]

Here, another factor encouraging a program of paid educational leave was at play, that of the popularity of workplace participatory programs among 'progressive' managers.

Labour-management cooperation in the form of quality circles, team concept, et al. is the watchword of the day and for some a cooperative workplace education program presents an opportunity for worker and management representatives to collaborate on a bipartite board. The CERI report noted that:

[Education leave enables people to have a permanent education and since its practical application depends on bodies on which the trade unions and employers' associations are equally represented, it is becoming a subject or testing-ground for strife or, if a socio-political consensus is arrived at, a means of changing the social organisation.]

Reasoning that matters of education are venues of potential conflict and thus locations of possible resolution, part of the appeal of PEL lies in the belief that the bipartite structure itself — often built into workplace education schemes — is also a path towards potential organisational transformation. From the point of view of an employer, encouraging employee

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169 Parker and Slaughter (1988).

170 CERI (1976: 95).
training and education has an obvious benefit\textsuperscript{171} (that of the 'value-added' employee), depending on the nature of the business and its training needs.

From the employee's standpoint, employment security is currently a chief concern which educational leave and the additional training it represents, might address. That educational leaves furnish workers with both skills and possible credentials are recognised benefits of PEL.\textsuperscript{172}

However, the French approach has been criticized for a lack of employee participation,\textsuperscript{173} blamed partly on the low level of funding and a lack of information.

**Italy**

The Italian PEL strategy has been distinctively different. Schuller commented that:

\[ \text{he essential formula was for a global number of hours to be calculated on the basis of the number of employees} \times 10 \times 3; \text{this number of hours to be available for educational leave over a three-year period.} \textsuperscript{174} \]

Italian law divided PEL costs between the employee, the state and the employer. Here too, the '150 hours agreement' (the maximum amount of available leave) was won during the late 1960s, during an atmosphere of worker uprisings. Schuller wrote that:

\[ \text{he idea of 'worker students' had a strong ideological flavour, with its rationale of uniting certain sections of society in the struggle against the existing pattern of power. There was a heavy emphasis on the collective raising of cultural and educational levels, as opposed to individual advancement. And there was an explicit challenge to the formal educational system and the way it defined knowledge and the content of} \]

\textsuperscript{171}\text{Ironside et al. (1984).}

\textsuperscript{172}\text{K. Davis (1979: 6-7).}

\textsuperscript{173}\text{Schuller (1990: 188).}

\textsuperscript{174}\text{Schuller (1990: 189).}
what is to be learnt.\textsuperscript{175}

This description sounds wonderfully reminiscent of the current CAW Paid Education Leave program. In a critical appraisal, Brasolin and Villone claimed that:

..there have been a number of changes since the early years of the '150 Hours' scheme, when everything was related to the world of work, and in particular to that of the factory. Today more time is given to current social problems ... In the Bologna courses, these are some of the subjects most frequently dealt with: health, nutrition, sexual relations, family relations, drug addiction, energy, pollution, elements of economy and political education (such as the powers of the state, the institutions, the Republican Constitution, and the role of the local authorities).\textsuperscript{176}

Consequently, a wider role has been carved out for the '150 Hours' schools, in a way which was comparable to the CAW-PEL program. There are similarities between the 'political education' portion of the '150 Hours' program and the CAW's Paid Educational Leave curriculum. However, the reader should note that there is a difference between paid education leave as proposed by the ILO and the CAW Paid Educational Leave program. One discrepancy is that PEL is an entirely union-led and union-authored program. Although PEL is funded by a negotiated, employer-levy,\textsuperscript{177} the authorship of the course content and the course pedagogy belong solely to the CAW. Additionally, PEL is interested in cultural, political, social and economic education. This means that "Paid Education Leave" as taken up by the CAW varies in form and content from some of the European national programs.

**Negotiating Educational Leave: The Laborious Task**

Negotiating PEL was no easy task, especially during a time of economic insecurity.

\textsuperscript{175}Schuller (1990: 190).

\textsuperscript{176}Brasolin and Villone in Mace and Yarnitt (1987: 144).

\textsuperscript{177}CAW Canada (1996b: 10).
The effects of educational leave are, as already noted by CERI and others, durable — although the early CAW experience was that workers had to be convinced of its value.\textsuperscript{178}

The chore of swaying a reluctant membership can be especially difficult during contract negotiations, which almost always take place under the shadow of possible strike action. On this particular dilemma former CAW President Bob White wrote:

I knew the membership couldn’t care less about paid education leave. I could picture a picket being asked what the strike was about and having to answer, “We want a penny an hour for paid education leave.” The membership would have killed us for holding out on that issue.\textsuperscript{179}

White recognised that PEL was not the only issue on the bargaining table, but felt that it was worth fighting for. This fact (and labour’s fight for universal PEL within the international community) contradicts Caldwell’s (1979) contention that:

[\textit{unions, it would seem, have placed educational leave provisions low on the list of priorities in their fights for better pay and conditions.}\textsuperscript{180}]

However, trade union leaders like White acknowledged the fact that workers have more pressing material demands to face,\textsuperscript{181} while still not giving up the fight for PEL. Davis also recognised that:

[\textit{education leave as a provision in employment contracts competes with other aspects of the contract such as rates of pay, hours of paid leave, hours of work ... employer paid benefits, etc., for in general, changes in one aspect viewed as favourable by employees will limit gains that may be made in other desirable aspects of the contract.}\textsuperscript{182}]

\textsuperscript{178}White (1987).

\textsuperscript{179}White (1987: 150).

\textsuperscript{180}Caldwell (1979: 4).

\textsuperscript{181}White (1987: 151).

\textsuperscript{182}Davis (1979: 2-3).
With so many competing forces at play, PEL has plainly not been an easy benefit for which to bargain. Since paid education leave is contested by more concrete benefits, it has been argued that PEL has an obligation to supply workers with more instrumental, more tangible benefits.\(^{183}\)

In their 1996 contract negotiations, the United Auto Workers (U.S.A.) maintained a paid educational leave program for UAW local leadership at General Motors. This, as will be shown later in this essay, is directly counter to the spirit of the UAW-CAW model of PEL.

For example, the 1996 American UAW contract highlights stated that:

> [t]he parties confirmed their commitment to this unique educational opportunity which provides plant level leaders with *enhanced knowledge about the auto industry* [my emphasis].\(^{184}\)

This program, chiefly intended to reinforce awareness about the automobile industry and little else, is a far cry from the explicit ideological, experiential and socio-political education program of the CAW.

### PEL: Future Legislative Possibilities

The ILO's recommendations were not adopted in Canada. Thomas says that the 1979 Commission of Inquiry on Educational Leave and Productivity decided that:

> PEL, as exciting and contentious as it was, remained an idea that would have to wait for better times.\(^{185}\)

PEL was considered too extravagant, according to Thomas\(^{186}\) it was viewed as "a luxury."

\(^{183}\)Ironside et al. (1984: 4).

\(^{184}\)UAW (1996).

\(^{185}\)Thomas (1983: 1).

\(^{186}\)Thomas (1983: 2).
He added a warning note that:

[t]he lack of accurate information about leave and its utilization, as about adult participation in education in general, a lack identified by the [Skilled Development Leave] Commission, continues in Canada.187

Furthermore Thomas claimed that without an infusion of accessible and accurate information, "any implementation of skill development leave, on any scale, must fail."188

In 1979, the Commission on Educational Leave and Productivity identified two exceptional Canadian groups which enjoyed educational leave, they found:

[a] limited number of collective agreements, negotiated primarily by the United Auto Workers, whereby union members were entitled to leave and costs for the purpose of taking part in educational programs provided by the union. In addition were the traditional rights to "sabbatical leave" enjoyed by university professors.189

It appears that this is true even today. In a discouragingly parallel tone and reporting the Australian experience, Caldwell noted that:

the realization of the universal right to paid educational leave is not likely to be achieved in the short term.190

Many of the European nations, at least those which had already-established paid educational leave,191 managed to retain their national programs.192 Here the United Kingdom was an exception, due in part to a combination of the rise of the Conservative party in the late 1970s and a flat economy.193 But, Schuller added that:

188 Thomas (1983a: 6-7).
190 Caldwell (1979: 2).
it would be wrong to assume that PEL is an idea whose time has gone almost without coming.\textsuperscript{194}

Does this give hope to a revitalization of the since forgotten program of paid education/skilled development leave in 1997? In their 1984 summary, the National Advisory Panel on Skill Development Leave recommended a program for universal educational leave, they advised that:

\begin{quote}
[p]rovincial and federal governments should enact legislation to provide all Canadian workers with the right to earn time-off to take leave for education and training purposes.\textsuperscript{195}
\end{quote}

In an introduction to their summary report, this panel carefully restated the decade-old history of paid education leave panels and studies since ILO 140. They catalogued no less than seven major Canadian reports, which had been submitted since the Adams Commission in 1979, recommending variations of educational leave. However, during the tail end of the 1982-1984 recession, the Federal government was still not yet ready to move a national policy on PEL.\textsuperscript{196}

Suggesting the necessary external conditions in the UK, Schuller claimed that:

\begin{quote}
[t]he prospects for PEL in the UK depend on a whole string of factors, most obviously the political complexion of the government over the next few years and the performance of the economy, nationally and in different industrial sectors … advances will be gained first by the relatively privileged sector of the labour force.\textsuperscript{197}
\end{quote}

Moreover, on the possibility of whether future support for PEL will ever develop, Schuller

\textsuperscript{194} Schuller (1990: 180).

\textsuperscript{195} Ironside et al. (1984: 20).

\textsuperscript{196} The end of the Liberal government’s regime and the beginning of the Conservative Mulroney era was another factor.

\textsuperscript{197} Schuller (1990: 190-1).
added that: "it is probable that it will make headway within the core labour force."  

More recently, at the UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) Fifth International Conference On Adult Education conference in Hamburg, Germany, a policy document entitled "Agenda for the Future of Adult Learning" was ratified. The policy, which outlines a recommitment to adult learning, stated in part that UNESCO:

..focuses on common concerns facing humanity on the eve of the twenty-first century and on the vital role that adult learning has to play in enabling women and men of all ages to face these most urgent challenges with knowledge, courage and creativity. 

It is in this context that UNESCO committed itself to improving the financing of adult education with a series of measures, including:

..promoting the ratification and application of the International Labour Organization Convention 140 (1974) concerning paid educational leave.

Even today, national programs of joint, employer and state-funded paid educational leave remain a largely unfulfilled promise, with some notable European national and select industry exceptions.

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198 Schuller (1990: 190).

199 The conference took place on July 14-18 1997.


Chapter 3. PEL and The CAW: An Overview and Brief History

The roots of PEL in Canada might be found in the traditions established during the tenure of Walter Reuther, the dynamic, almost mythic, former President of the United Auto Workers who reigned from 1946 until his death in 1970. Reuther set a brisk pace for the socially-conscious UAW, one that eventually saw the union represent the apex of progressive trade unionism.

Reuther’s Socialist Party background, as well as his working-tour of prewar Europe and the Soviet Union, had a formative influence on his vision of working-class potential and the possibilities inherent in education. Reuther, and younger brother Victor, were both young, skilled tool and die makers and they saw much worthy of praise in the former Soviet Republic.

Reuther biographer Nelson Lichtenstein explained that Roy, Walter’s older brother had taught at Brookwood Labour College, in New York where Walter and Victor lectured on their European quest. Brookwood, a radical educational institution with close ties to the Socialist Party, was founded in the post-World War I era of new found working-class zeal and innovative labour education approaches. Moreover, the school had been a key radicalizing element during the time that the CIO unions were blossoming. Lichtenstein chronicled Brookwood’s influence as follows:

[These young [CIO] radicals came to Brookwood for a summer or a season to sharpen

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their understanding of the new union movement and win the political credentials to become organizers or staffers after "graduation." ... Half-commune, and half-classroom, Brookwood offered both its students and its faculty the kind of rich, personally gratifying experience that often marks off a generation.206

And what did the Brookwood educational curriculum consist of? To those who are acquainted with PEL, it certainly seems a familiar program, one which included "labour history, public speaking, and "labour dramatics," and which also offered a "revolutionary" interpretation of labor's cause."207 But the influence of the left did not end with Brookwood.

The Danish pioneer Grundtvig's "folk high schools"208 eventually became a haven for Nordic social-democratic education.209 The former socialist Reuther, excited by the potential of this model, based the UAW's Michigan-based education centre at Black Lake on his Northern European experience. Lichtenstein wrote that:

Reuther had been particularly impressed with the lakeside educational facility of the Swedish Metal Workers Federation at Skogaholm, which he visited in the mid-1960s. To be the first director at Black Lake, Reuther chose an old Socialist, Brendan Sexton, whose innovative programs did make those attending the school more active in the UAW, as well as more critical of the UAW's top leadership.210

According to Saul, the CAW strayed much less from the political and educational convictions of Walter Reuther's vision of social unionism. He stated that:

[t]he CAW, unlike its counterparts in the U.S., has built upon and extended the Reuther principle of "social unionism" that was originally so much a part of the UAW.211

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208Grundtvig's influential schools are discussed below.


Gindin reaffirmed the notion of Reutherian social unionism when he wrote that:

[the most internal issue the CAW faced ... was recreating the magnetic force that brought and kept the union together; the CAW had to create what Walter Reuther long ago called militant loyalty to the union and its cause.]

Whether it was due to the dynamics of Reutherism, the political and economic climate of the day, the ratification of the ILO 140 or the encounters of (former UAW Canadian Director of Education) Gord Wilson and fellow staffer Dan Benedict with European labour education techniques, the course of Canadian labour education changed dramatically with the introduction of the United Auto Workers' PEL program in 1978.

It should be noted that the Education Centre's facilities, located on the shores of Lake Huron, had been a part of the Canadian union's history decades before the establishment of PEL. On the CAW's Port Elgin educational facilities and programs, Benedict put it this way:

Set up in 1957 and maintained by local unions' contributions (beyond their regular dues to the originally "international" UAW in Detroit), the Canadian Auto Workers' education centre managed without funds from either Detroit or Ottawa to become the year-round home of innovative workers' education projects. Of particular note are the two-week residential Family Education Programs in summer and one-month (in five sections) residential Paid Educational Leave (PEL) program the rest of the year.

It is true that the Federal government never directly funded PEL, although in 1977 Ottawa signed an agreement which funded Canadian labour education in both unionized and non-unionized workplaces. This took a great deal of financial pressure off the shoulders of the union movement and in effect enabled the UAW to pursue alternative courses in labour education, like the PEL program.

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215See also Thomas, Abbey et al. (1982).
In the remainder of this chapter I survey some of the key historical motivators for initializing the PEL program and review the program’s original design goals and purpose through an evaluation of the original PEL manual and background interviews conducted with key UAW-CAW figures.

The Economic Climate

The comparative health of the auto industry made the bargaining efforts and contractual advances of the UAW-CAW much less demanding than in other, less robust sectors of the economy. The auto sector was a key player in the Canadian economy, particularly during the postwar boom and even more so after the implementation of the 1965 Automotive Agreement, better known as the Auto Pact. Yates wrote that this continental agreement unlocked the once-closed tariff walls between the U.S. and Canada, thus boosting production of automotive products, reducing costs within the industry and enlarging auto production greatly. The result was that:

[t]he Canadian auto industry prospered under the Auto Pact up until the late 1970s. So too did the Canadian branch of the UAW, which in the post-Auto Pact years saw its membership increase and autoworkers’ fortunes improve.\(^\text{216}\)

Against this backdrop of expansion, the UAW/CAW searched for methods of political struggle which transcended the negotiating table’s traditional wage and benefit packages.

ILO 140: Setting the Stage for PEL

As discussed earlier, Paid Education Leave had been ratified at the ILO in 1974 and Convention 140 was awaiting the ’warm embrace’ of its member-nations. Gord Wilson, the

\(^{216}\)C. Yates (1993: 21).
former UAW Education Director for the UAW Canadian region, said:

...in Canada they never did it, despite the fact that then labour minister Jack [John] Monro proclaimed it a success... [He] pointed to the fact that Canadians had helped to win that on a world [scale]...at that time the labour minister was Jack Monro, he did nothing to adopt it here in Canada.217

Dan Benedict, former Assistant General Secretary to the International Metalworkers Federation (IMF) and former PEL Program Director added that:

...among my various tasks, I was responsible for worker education. In that responsibility I began to discover how much ahead of us many of the European unions were...and the fact that one after the other they had won in different ways, the right to paid education leave.218

In June 1977, Federal Labour Minister John Monro claimed support for Convention 140 in ILO member-nations. Benedict, a union staffer who worked for the UAW during the administration of former President Walter Reuther, was the Assistant to the General Secretary to the IMF in Geneva. Benedict recollected:

when...delegations from the Canadian labour movement [and]... different parts of the U.S...spent a large part of their time seeing how PEL was [used]...in Europe. And the then Education Director, Gord Wilson, who is now the President of the Ontario Federation of labour, played a role in that, an important role.219

As the UAW Director of Education of the day, Gord Wilson recalled his part in the Paid Education Leave debate at the ILO:

...there was the ILO convention, I think that was [Convention number] 140 we had been pressuring the Federal government in Canada. They had voted for it in Geneva but never implemented it in Canada.220

Although a signatory to the 1974 convention, Canada never paid heed to ILO Convention 140

217Telephone interview with Gord Wilson, September 12, 1995.


and three years later at the 1977 ILO meeting in Geneva, Monro's support for PEL caused some concern to editorial writers at The Globe and Mail who publicly wrung their hands and worried:

..what company is going to want to invest in new or expanded development in a country where even more social programs may be laid on already sagging shoulders? Sure, there are individuals who would welcome the thought of a year's paid leave in the vicinity of the Sorbonne in Paris. But somebody's got to carry the load, do the work.221

The Globe and Mail position, presumably representative of Canada's business elite, was a mixture of issues, some real, others imagined: the fear of a detrimental effect on national production, an overload of social program costs and perhaps most telling: contempt for workers who may actually be interested in what institutions like the Sorbonne have to offer.

It is also interesting to note that, prophetically, the Globe and Mail's distress at Canada's 'embarrassment of riches' (our national social programs) has today become a familiar theme which has spread far beyond the pages of The Globe. Unfortunately, the current Canadian debate is not the nature of which of social programs we are proposing to add — but rather which national social benefits we are going to eliminate.

During his visit to Europe, Wilson was particularly impressed by the German and Swedish government-funded PEL programs. He described the impact of these model programs:

I mean the Swedes at that time [1975] had the luxury of the equivalent of 13 million Canadian each year to try to determine how to spend it on labour education, that was a direct grant from the [Swedish] federal government. There was no such thing like that here in Canada for the foreseeable future.222

The elitist view of Canada's business class provides a startling contrast to Gord Wilson’s

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221''Somebody has to work,'' The Globe and Mail 27 June, 1977, 6.

The elitist view of Canada's business class provides a startling contrast to Gord Wilson's impression of Paid Education Leave in Europe at the time, he said:

because of the degree to which they had evolved in terms of accepting the concept of worker education being a legitimate part of the fabric of life [my emphasis] in those countries and that the trade unions were recognized as educators in the same sense that universities were.223

The Globe and Mail's opinion did not go unchallenged. Ian Morrison, former Director of the Canadian Association for Adult Education and a proponent of Paid Education Leave, countered The Globe and Mail's attack and wrote that:

[far from draining additional tax resources, paid educational leave represents an alternative to many expensive aspects of present manpower training policy in Canada.224

Morrison pointed out that "paid education leave represents an economic means of accomplishing this important goal [...] to adapt to new and different circumstances which will require most of us to learn new skills."225 He said the European countries which had adopted paid education leave programs alternated short-term "specific learning opportunities"226 with longer periods of work, thus fewer than 2 percent of the workforce was absent at any given time.

This on-again-off-again strategy would eventually be adopted by the Canadian variant of PEL — an important feature to a union dominated by an industry 'plagued' by high worker absenteeism. Benedict explained the openness of labour to a PEL program which did not interfere with automotive production schedules or output.

Among other things, we were perfectly willing here to limit the number of people that would be away at any one time from any one plant. The 2% idea was general all over the world. Nobody ever even thought of getting more than that. The only place where for a while it looked as if there were going to be problems of that sort was in Italy, where in Italy the unions ... the Italians put it through in the sector agreement and they...have an agreement whereby every single worker in the course of three years has six weeks PEL. Every single worker in the metal industries, in chemical...  

The Globe and Mail's fears were unfounded. Aside from some Italian sectoral agreements, there would be no 'threat' of a PEL program cutting into national production.

Benedict recalled his role as Assistant General Secretary to the I.M.F. (International Metalworkers' Federation) in the Paid Education Leave debate:

The I.C.F.T.U. [International Confederation of Free Trade Unions] which...acted as a secretariat for the workers' delegates in the International Labour Organization [ILO] of the U.N. decided to press for a treaty, or a convention as they called it in the ILO, giving workers everywhere the right to paid education leave. I was asked to be the 'whip' for that subject — to follow it — from one year to the next...to make sure that not only the worker delegates, but the government delegates ... fight for a majority ... and we succeeded in getting a convention adopted for paid education leave everywhere in the world. However in each country it was up to the [host] governments to adopt their own legislation to carry it out.  

Therefore in Canada, despite a last-minute effort, Labour Minister Monro was not able to convince the federal Liberal cabinet to adopt a national PEL program. There were some efforts to examine the possibilities of a provincial program, but they too were aborted.

Worthy of note is the fact that, in June 1977, Benedict, then also affiliated with the Labour Studies Program at McMaster University, was appointed by the Ontario Ministry of Labour to conduct a study on "whether industrial democracy as practised in Western Europe can be adapted to the Canadian scene."  

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228 Benedict interview, 1995.
229 List (1977: 2).
Benedict not only acted as a catalyst for the adoption of paid education leave in Western Europe, via his role in the I.M.F., but he also eventually designed and wrote the program and curriculum for what eventually became the first paid education leave program in North America — the UAW's PEL.

Canada never did adopt a national, state-sponsored Paid Education Leave program. Instead — weary of waiting over seven years for the Federal government to move on the matter — Wilson and Benedict prodded the (Canadian) UAW leadership towards negotiating a PEL program on their own, although UAW Canadian regional leader Bob White needed little encouragement. But it is perhaps this impatience that hastened the adoption of the dictum that PEL be bargained for, rather than legislated. As Wilson noted:

I think it was around 1970, and we had conducted this campaign fighting like hell to try and get the government of Canada to adopt it [Convention 140] and that was also one of ..the reasons, I guess, when I came back from Europe the realization was that to hang waiting for government policy, we’d be there forever. we had to find a way to deal with it ourselves so we fixed on the idea of negotiating it with employers.\(^{230}\)

The unwillingness to allow the spark of a European-style education program to linger and perhaps die was almost too much for Wilson to bear. After returning from his whirlwind European trip, which included thirty-two meetings in only twenty days, he spoke to other UAW officials like Bob Nickerson, who was the secretary-treasurer of the UAW Canada Region and Dennis McDermott the Canadian UAW President. Wilson related that:

We were caught in a little bit of a bind when I went to Europe in ’75 and first came up with the idea and came back and then started to talk to people...I remember Bob Nickerson and I sat up all one night trying to figure out how the hell to get this to work, and then we had to go to McDermott and convince him and get him onboard and then we had to start going to some staff people and some local union people in order to find ways to get them onboard and then we finally started the bargaining process.\(^{231}\)


\(^{231}\)Wilson interview, 1995.
On his return from Europe, Wilson found that he had a problem; in his mind’s eye he saw the rich, state-funded $13 million Swedish version of the paid education leave program and the progressive German model as being far too expensive to bring to Canada. Wilson noted that:

[...they were both critical analyses, challenging types of models in terms of teaching. Both had residential programs that were really quite terrific ... good resources and research ... it all came down to money. Anyways, the question is, how do you find it?]

Now that the problem of which model of PEL to adopt was solved, the next difficulty to overcome was how to adapt the German-Swedish model to Canada without state funding.

...in both of those examples (Sweden and Germany) there was substantial and significant funding from the state. In Canada we didn’t see that was coming, that’s why we came back and tried to bang out how we could do it, and settled on a bargaining program.

Finally the UAW Canadian region negotiated a PEL clause. On March 21, 1977 the United Auto Workers (UAW) signed their first PEL agreement — not with a large auto manufacturer as expected — but with Rockwell (Canada), a manufacturer employing “1,100 union members in its Chatham and Milton [parts] operations.”

Wilson recalled:

I...think that the Rockwell agreement was the one that was first negotiated [but] there were three plants: Chatham, Milton and Oshawa.

Wilson recollected that it was over a year until PEL saw its first participants. He explained the reasons for the sudden jumpstart of the program, after a lengthy pause, in the Fall of 1978:

234Wilson interview, 1995. Benedict, however points out that a Quebec local signed a PEL clause on the very same day.
What happened was we...had by the time that Dan was hired, a number of employers who ... had already negotiated an agreement. And it had been about a year and ... the employers, were beginning to wonder what we were doing with the money that they had paid into the PEL fund. And so we had some urgency in terms of we didn’t want to see any rearguard action that would erode us, employers beginning to try and dismantle what we already put in place. And secondly we were just starting to get some pressure from people who were interested in what it was we were doing and so we had to move quickly and that’s why Dan came in, there was a very short time frame between what we converted from theory to practice.\footnote{Wilson interview, 1995.}

Accordingly the UAW’s Canadian region had to move quickly, from little more than Benedict’s expertise and the inspiration both he and Wilson had absorbed while in Europe, to a developed labour-education program. White noted the occasion of this period in his autobiography. He recalled that:

\begin{quote}
[i]n September 1978, thirty-one union members embarked on the first PEL program at our Port Elgin facility. By the end of the year we had PEL in 117 of our contracts covering 33,500 workers and we were looking to get it in our Big Three contracts during the 1979 round of bargaining talks.\footnote{White (1987: 148).}
\end{quote}

Together, Benedict, Wilson and the Canadian regional leadership of the UAW had finally made PEL a reality in Canada. The next challenge was not going to be a simple one: it was going to take a lot of nerve to confront the Big Three automakers with the demand to fully fund PEL.

**Bargaining PEL for Autoworkers**

The UAW’s Canadian staff realized that PEL would not really take off until it was won at the negotiating tables of the ‘Big Three’ auto manufacturers: General Motors, Ford and Chrysler. Benedict recalled the struggles UAW Director for Canada, Bob White, had during the General Motors round of negotiations in 1979:
know they dragged their feet - the Big Three were next to the last to come in ... the GM top bargainers, after making cracks about "you'll never get your people to strike for that" or "what are you going to teach them - Marxism?" ... all ...sort of things trying to push it off the table.\textsuperscript{238}

In \textit{Hard Bargains: My Life on the Line}, White described the heated atmosphere during negotiations with GM's Vice-President in charge of Industrial Relations, George Morris. The principle of the union was to pay for PEL with a company fund based on the formula of one penny per worker per hour worked. As quoted above, White claimed that the membership would have been enraged at the demand for "a penny an hour for paid education leave,"\textsuperscript{239} had they been aware of it. The assumption here was that the membership would have preferred to negotiate a wage increase rather than an education program, no matter how high the calibre.

Benedict recounted that during the GM negotiations the company negotiator Morris:

...said finally, "well, it looks as if you're really serious about it. In that case, we'll go along with you but providing we can help you. And Bob said "What do you mean, "you can help us?" And they said, "Well, we'd like to help you choose which union members can go to the course and what the curriculum should be." He [White] said "No, thanks."\textsuperscript{240}

This was precisely the kind of Paid Education Leave program which was won some years later in the U.S. auto industry. Although funded by the employer, each auto manufacturer has their own program and assists in the development of the curriculum and choice of participants.

...when GM gave that same answer to the UAW in the States, they said "Well if that's the way you want it..." Alright, so they have a GM PEL, they have a Chrysler PEL, they have a Ford PEL - I don't know how many others and in each one, the company

\textsuperscript{238}Benedict interview, 1995.

\textsuperscript{239}White (1987: 150).

\textsuperscript{240}Benedict, telephone interview, 1995.
they have a Ford PEL - I don't know how many others and in each one, the company has a hand in setting the curriculum.241

Unlike his American counterparts, White and the UAW bargaining team refused to allow the Big Three to re-write the curriculum. As Benedict recounted, when the terms of agreement with General Motors were finally accepted, PEL was singled out for special treatment:

So they [GM] went back to fighting and then they punished him - they punished all of us - when they finally accepted it at a quarter to midnight on New Year's Eve. They said "everything else in the agreement is retroactive to Sept 14, which is when the old contract expired, except PEL. PEL doesn't start "till tomorrow." It was chickenshit. And I've forgotten exactly how much they saved - somewhere between fifty and a hundred thousand dollars - and thousands, they use thousand dollar bills for toothpicks - you know, it was meaningless for them, but they were sort of going to give us a little lesson and they did. We [later] told all the students in PEL what had happened and they were furious. They said "that's how management acts." So they did teach us a lesson on what bastards they can be.242

Here the General Motors-UAW round of negotiations yielded a real-life lesson for the PEL participants of the day: a lesson about the nature of those who hold the reins of power, and how they can flex their muscle and put that might to use.

It would have been a typical lesson for PEL participants, except that this time the lesson cost the program hundreds of thousands of dollars. If PEL was ever to be a success, it would eventually need more funding than Morris offered.

PEL: Initial Obstacles and Inspirations

PEL began life in North America over a year before the GM negotiations, in September 1978. But up to this point it was only a seed of an idea; before PEL could be turned into reality, Benedict had the unenviable task of developing and writing the entire


twenty-day long program in only two short months. Benedict reminisced:

I was stuck with the job, and it was considered generous, to write a program in a two month period...I ate, slept and dreamed PEL. When I think back to the hectic two month period...I would have collapsed.²⁴³

It is of significance that a decade later, in 1987, Benedict commented²⁴⁴ on the influence of the Nordic "Folk High Schools" which were conceived in Denmark by "bard, historian, theologian and educator"²⁴⁵ Nikolaj F.S. Grundtvig.

Notably, Benedict counts Grundtvig as a primary influence in the formation of PEL.

While claiming that the CAW programs did not entirely duplicate Grundtvig’s four principles, he wrote that the program had shared "societal aspects" of the Dane’s philosophies.²⁴⁶ Grundtvig’s four principles for education were particularly cited by Benedict as a key influence. They were as follows:

(1) School for life, that is, a general or literal rather than vocational approach; (2) "historical-poetical, living word" or idealistic and even mythical rather than commercial nationalism; (3) "folkelig" or people’s culture from the tribe to humanity; and (4) residential schools for adults to live the experience together..²⁴⁷

However Benedict conceded that Grundtvig’s principles had not thrived beyond the boundaries of Northern Europe.²⁴⁸

First established in 1844, by the 1890s Folk High Schools had spread across Denmark with over seventy such institutions organized. Benedict claimed that the schools were:

nineteenth century and into the twentieth.\textsuperscript{249}

Although there certainly exists an unreserved Danish nationalist streak,\textsuperscript{250} Rordam, in an attempt to separate the folk schools from Germany’s reputed military nationalism, differentiates between Grundtvig’s "national feeling" and nationalism. He claimed the former as not being comparable to nationalism.\textsuperscript{251} Grundtvig’s principles were adapted by a variety of groups, from churches to trade unions. Benedict claimed that the PEL program was a "considerably more modest but persistent residential adult education effort"\textsuperscript{252} than the Nordic Folk High Schools.

Paulo Freire’s educational philosophies might seem like an obvious touchstone to the conscientizacao-like principles of PEL. When asked if Freire was indeed an influence in either the formation or curriculum development of PEL, Benedict replied:

I got to know him in Geneva when he was in exile. Certainly he had an effect on me. I don’t think in terms of individuals ... normally, who had an affect on me... but rather movements ... the Scandinavians, the Belgians...The Belgians had and have a very active labour education program and [...] the Belgians probably are those who most linked trade unionism and socialism. in other words, in their schools, they make no bones about it. the unions are part of the socialist movement. The unions, the Party and the co-ops...the three...of the socialist movement. And so they had some effect on me.\textsuperscript{253}

However it should be noted that more recent influences on the program are unequivocally Freirian. A recent CAW advertisement shows a photograph of the CAW Port Elgin Centre which is paired with the Freire quote: "Without a minimum of hope we cannot so much as

\textsuperscript{249} Benedict (1987: 149).

\textsuperscript{250} Moller and Watson (1944).

\textsuperscript{251} Rordam (1980: 23).

\textsuperscript{252} Benedict (1987: 149).

\textsuperscript{253} Benedict interview, 1995.
which is paired with the Freire quote: "Without a minimum of hope we cannot so much as start the struggle." But this particular development is a recent one, and makes no claims on the formation of PEL's curriculum or structure.

Besides the Northern Europeans, other influences which inspired Benedict were the French and Latin American unions. On the former Benedict recounted that he:

..worked an awful lot with worker - educators from other parts of the world. [...] The French in particular, the French CFDT union has always been by far the union in France and one of the unions in Europe most active in the field of workers' education, and they had a lot of influence on me.  

Recalling the years he spent in Latin America, and the influence on his vision of labour education, Benedict found that:

..we had to encourage people to keep on fighting through years of oppression and of people being killed. We found that by doing a continuing job in the field of education we were able to create something of a culture of their own as trade unionists.

Thus the lineage of CAW's PEL program can be traced to a variety of international, often trade union, roots. Among other influences its ancestry spans the experiential, cultural schools of the Nordic nations, independent working-class schools, the popular-education movement, Soviet schools such as The Evening University of Marxism-Leninism and Third World and organized trade union struggles against oppressive regimes. Of course there are the examples of Horton's Highlander schools, as well as other popular education

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254 Our Times (1997) back cover.


258 Mickiewicz (1967: 51-61).

259 Note that Benedict cites his experiences in the trade union struggles of Latin America, so he is not entirely bereft of Freirian influence.
Wilson recalled laying out his view of some of the goals and objectives of the program, based on what he had seen in Geneva, but he relied on Benedict’s years of experience in Geneva, Latin America and a host of Canadian universities. Wilson recounted that:

We talked about parameters, we wanted people to understand how the union worked, what tools we had available to us to use, who our adversaries were, what was the role of all of the players within the system we all operated in and what it was we could try to find a way to deal with it in terms of finding solutions.261

Luckily, Benedict could count on the assistance of two discussion leaders who were willing to assimilate the new program as they were delivering it. After each session, Benedict met with UAW educational staff to review the program’s progress. However there were some fundamental problems regarding the makeup of the participants. Some argued for a program which taught political awareness to the rank-and-file, while others opted for a program aimed solely at the union leadership.

We had pretty strong discussions within the staff on that and one approach was "this is necessary for leadership training" and another was the feeling that this should be broad enough to include just the hope that we would train what some people call activists, whether they ever became leaders or not... in other words, active unionists. So that was the eventual decision.262

Wilson also recalled heated discussions among the staff and executive of the UAW over who the program would be aimed at. It appears that at its heart this was a debate over whether to change the political awareness of elected committeepersons, shop stewards, local presidents


\footnote{Wilson interview, 1995.}

\footnote{Benedict interview, 1995.}
and the like, or the average UAW member. Wilson said:

..I was on the side of the second group. I would argue that this was basically an activist program ... And there was some conflict then, because local union leaders, some of them saw the training of others as a threat to their office. That's how it developed ... Some of the 'politicians' in the local unions thought that [the] PEL program was a hotbed of opposition.263

The reaction of local presidents was a key factor in the survival of PEL during the early days of the program. Many came from conservative communities or felt that the program represented a threat to their future as elected representatives. Wilson added:

Because those people would come back to the plant and then [create problems] so we had to say to the activists "Lookit friends, we want you to get involved in the labour movement, but you don’t come back and run for President. What you do is you come back and you get involved in something. And then you will evolve through the [union] political process. We want you to get active, that's what we want you to do.264

In some cases these feelings of anxiety were truly justified. Some UAW local union presidents occasionally used harsh methods to retain their power and keep any contenders for their job at bay. After all, depending on the size of the local’s membership, the position of local president is often full-time — and highly coveted. A choice between that post and a job on the assembly line presented local presidents and elected reps with a stark contrast and an easy alternative.

I think..that nobody in the local leadership was upset about what was in the binders, they were upset about what people did when they came back because a lot of them [local leadership] would be challenged. In some cases, quite frankly, the challenges were quite valid.265

In Oshawa's UAW Local 222, decisions about who would attend PEL were clouded

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by the additional factor of struggles between the rival caucuses which controlled union affairs and life on the line at GM. This decision sometimes depended on which faction dominated the majority of the local executive and the affiliation of a worker applying to PEL.

Unfortunately this theme was repeated in several recent interviews. One participant said:

[t]here’s ... political caucuses in here and they fight back and forth ... So, if you’re with one, support one, then they do more little favours for you. The other caucuses, if they know that you support it, they’ll shuffle you back. Interviewer: They’ll put your application at the bottom of the pile? Yes.266

Course Design and Content: Varying Viewpoints

Gord Wilson, the UAW Canadian region’s Education Director of the day, recounted the overall structure of the program and its wide-ranging efforts in the following way:

We looked at how the parliamentary structure worked, we looked at how you would deal with the employer, what the roots of multinational corporations were, the extent of the finance community and multinationals in terms of controlling people’s lives. In the economic sector...I think Dan coined the phrase 'kitchen-table economics' or 'kitchen economics' so...we went from very basic beginnings to explaining to people how the system worked and how workers usually get ripped off within that system.267

In fact, "Kitchen economics for the worker’s family" is the subject that led the third week of the (originally five, but later) four-week program. The course opened with a sociological look at "primitive humanity" beginning with the Stone Age and continuing through an explanation of the division of labour, the trend to private property and the emergence of class stratification.

Other chapters in the third week covered "A Sense of History," "The National Economy and How it Affects Us," "Information and Statistics," "Economics for Collective

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266Interview PEL05.A96.

Bargaining," and "International Trade, Multinational Companies and International Labour Action." The course was intended from the start as a supplement to a worker's understanding of the world and the role of an individual within that world.

In designing the original program, there was a deliberate attempt to avoid overlapping the curriculum of the 'tool courses' which, even today, are a vital part of the CAW education programs. Benedict explained that:

The decision was made that it would be a societal program, not a tool program. It was not going to be trying to rival or improve on the tool programs that were going on all over the UAW. This was something different. Because it was felt that the dimension of trade unionism had changed. And that trade unionists needed to be not only in favour of changing society, of building a better world but more conscious of it. And more capable in order to be active not only in their union but in their community. So you had to understand the role of labour in the country and of the economy in the country and of the economy in the worker's life. I mean those are not subjects of tool courses.  

Benedict's view is explained in a somewhat different tone in his introduction to the original PEL manual’s third chapter entitled "A Sense of History." Here Benedict gave PEL participants, some of whom may have been resistant to this particular topic, the reasons why an explanation of history is necessary.

This brief "Sense of History" is meant to give the UAW - Paid Education Leave participants some of the background for understanding economics. This is no attempt to condense the whole history of humanity in a few pages. Nor to memorize a list of dates. Rather, we've outlined some of the major economic changes that have marked the stages of that history. Understanding them can help us take up some of the problems that face Canadian workers today and that we will discuss in later sessions of this course.  

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Former PEL director, Ken Luckhardt, demonstrated that the focus of the current\textsuperscript{271} PEL course has not varied much from its roots, he said:

there's a couple of modules within the four-week program that are essentially tool course type issues in them, and that is collective bargaining, and representation issues of steward's training but I mean, that is not its major focus.\textsuperscript{272}

The CAW claims that this program is "the only one of its kind in North America,"\textsuperscript{273} although the CAW shares the Port Elgin facilities with the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW), who now offer a scaled-down version of PEL.\textsuperscript{274} In 1994 Spencer noted that CUPW had negotiated a "three-cents per member levy" in their contracts and used:

the Port Elgin facility to run a number of PEL classes alongside CAW course in preparation for mounting a separate CUPW program.\textsuperscript{275}

Several interview respondents noted the presence of CUPW members, as this Local 222 participant noted:

..the (sic) French postal service, [CUPW] ..were there. But what they [LUDLs] did in the plenary, they'd have the posties from Quebec ... in a corner with all the [translator] headphones on and then they'd take those people away for certain lessons, ..back in the plenary. So there wasn't this huge bonding that apparently goes on in Port Elgin.\textsuperscript{276}

Although one hopes this was an isolated incident, it appears that some extra care is required if one is to dovetail members from diverse unions. However, the barrier in this example may have been the linguistic, rather than union background, a fact which is no less unsettling.

\textsuperscript{271}By "current" I refer to the PEL manual of 1995. All other references are to the earlier 1980-81 version.

\textsuperscript{272}Telephone interview with Ken Luckhardt, August, 1995.

\textsuperscript{273}CAW Canada. (1994: 1).

\textsuperscript{274}Spencer (1994: 56).

\textsuperscript{275}Spencer (1994: 56).

\textsuperscript{276}Interview PEL01.496.
Chapter 4. Paid Education Leave: The CAW Program

The PEL course content currently includes subject areas such as: labour history, sociology, political science and economy as well as public speaking, communications and media literacy. Ken Luckhardt, a former director of PEL claimed that:

"...the overall objective [of PEL] is to give workers the confidence to participate in the union and in their society to try to implement progressive social change."

At PEL, workers who had rarely experienced the opportunity to speak their thoughts in a noncompetitive atmosphere now find their voice, like this worker who quietly said:

"...with PEL you have a sense of um, everybody's equal, you know there's no um, there's no "I'm better than anybody else," sort of thing. And they make, they make such a good environment for even the weakest um, person like with low self esteem, or not enough confidence ...maybe the way they speak. You know their speech might be a different from normal people--from us, right? That they make it, make it a good environment for everybody to share and open up and talk."

Accordingly, one of the goals of PEL is to have workers find, not only their voice, but their political ambition as well. It is through the PEL vehicle that the CAW hopes to realize their long-term goal which is that of creating trade union activists in order to effect social transformation.

Today's PEL is divided into an unpaid introductory weekend session and four week-long rounds, for a total of twenty days of paid leave, twenty-two days in total. Several years ago, one-and-two week follow-up programs were introduced. Each week of Paid Education Leave is separated by two to four weeks back on the job at the workplace.


278 Interview PEL02.496.

279 The following information comes from interviews with CAW staff, Saul (1994) and my own experiences in the CAW.

Approximately 100-125 participants enrol in each session and the program takes place twice annually, in the Fall and Spring. According to Luckhardt, PEL has had almost 6,000 participants (including those who have taken part in one and two-week courses) take part over the past two decades.\textsuperscript{281}

CAW Local 222 currently gathers PEL funding from a (GM) levy of 5\$ per person, per person hour worked. These funds are distributed to "The CAW Leadership Training Program (PEL Trust),"\textsuperscript{282} as is the case in the Master Agreement between General Motors and the CAW. The GM/CAW fund has "received contributions since March of 1980."\textsuperscript{283} Over 90 percent of CAW members have PEL clauses negotiated in their contracts.\textsuperscript{284}

Gindin\textsuperscript{285} explained that the unique feature of PEL is its combination of the following six elements: 1. Ideological Orientation, that is, PEL is designed to provide CAW members with an ideological view rooted in a working-class orientation. 2. Adult Education; while there is a course text housed in four binders, as well as course lectures, the emphasis is on group discussion and the collective experiences of the participants. Gindin claimed that on the whole, there is little sense of a 'top-down' approach. 3. Peer Training; PEL shuns paid professionals and instead uses peer tutors drawn directly from the workplace, called "Local Union Discussion Leaders (LUDLs)" to guide classroom conversations. 4. Blocks of Education; PEL takes place over an extended period of time, allowing workers to return to

\textsuperscript{281}Luckhardt interview, 1995.

\textsuperscript{282}General Motors of Canada and the CAW (1993: 339).

\textsuperscript{283}General Motors of Canada and the CAW (1993: 339).

\textsuperscript{284}Gindin (1995).

their jobs and families for a period of reflection. 5. Residential; PEL emphasizes the informal learning and sharing which takes place 'after hours' on the site of the CAW Education Centre.

6. Company-paid; PEL is completely funded by a negotiated 'tax' on employers. Yet PEL is "completely administered by the union."²⁸⁶

The basis of PEL's pedagogical form lies in group discussion. Sessions are kick-started with a shared reading from the PEL manual, a nerve-wrenching exercise for those not comfortable with reading aloud. There are, however other methods such as films, videos, song and a mix of small-group, "buzz-group" and plenary sessions.

PEL: The Preparatory Session

Once the selection process is complete participants are invited to attend a weekend course at their own time and expense at the Port Elgin facilities. This last point is significant, as Martin has noted.²⁸⁷ The concept of "lost time" within the Canadian union movement is extremely important. Lost time repays trade unionists for the earnings they would normally receive while on the job. Rank-and-file members seldom breathe the rarefied air of the 'lost-time crowd', which typically consists of elected representatives.

For many participants, PEL is a first-time experience of any form of paid leave, educational or otherwise. It is with a special significance that the weekend preparatory session takes place without any lost time compensation. PEL participants are expected to demonstrate their commitment by volunteering a weekend of their own time in exchange for twenty days of paid leave.

PEL's weekend session begins from the notion of overcoming a 'faulty' public education, to wit: "Most workers do not have many fond memories of their years in school." The discussion focuses on formal public schooling and categorizes the working-class experience in three groups: 1. those who drop out; 2. those who are streamed into lower sections; and 3. those who stick it out, totally bored.

Right at the start there is an attempt to separate PEL from these tarnished school experiences. This is reminiscent of Gord Wilson's childhood school impressions which I described earlier. Based on the literature cited above, this may reflect a sizable quantity of working-class school experiences as well.

PEL recasts these individual experiences as collective ones and thus enters the arena of an 'oppressed class' and class consciousness. PEL describes itself here as an alternative education program which is "established by workers" and "controlled and delivered by workers."

Some minimal goals are laid out: critical analysis for working people, the encouragement that workers "develop their individual skills" and abilities to better meet the "goals and aspirations of all working-class people" and the confidence to participate in their union and society in a "democratic fashion" and becoming "involved in the struggle for social change." Class consciousness, overcoming oppression, ideological struggle and establishing frameworks for social analysis are the key messages here. A set of discussions

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289 See for example Curtis et al. (1992) and Willis (1977).

290 CAW Canada, PEL Preparatory Manual, 2.

are kicked off around the subject of who is served by the post-industrial revolution school system, with a series of statements in the Bowles and Gintis framework:

schools in capitalist societies have been assigned a particular role: the maintenance and reproduction of capitalism and the values on which it depends ... [and] Most fundamentally, schools and their curricula often serve to perpetuate and legitimize inequalities of social class, either by refusing to deal with them or by making them appear to be natural and inevitable.  

This echoes Darder's first theme, discussed above, that school texts overvalue "social harmony, social compromise, and political consensus."

The 'corporatization' of public education and corporate intrusion into the school curriculum is discussed via an examination of Goodyear Tire's incursion into a Napanee, Ontario high school.

The final component of PEL's introductory session is "Learning by Participating". A framework for how PEL's discussion groups are structured for the coming weeks is reviewed. "Buzz groups" consist of an inner core of participants (the "working party") who are scrutinized by an outer core of "observers." Roles are played out in this manner, then reversed, after which both sets of observers may comment on the proceedings. Thus, a democratic participatory framework is cast.

The session ends with several take-home assignments, assigned for Level one of PEL, including instructions to secure a copy of the latest local union meeting agenda, minutes, financial report and by-laws which will come in handy for the upcoming exercise on local union democracy.

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292Ken Osbourne in CAW Canada, PEL Preparatory Manual, 4-5.

293Darder (1991: 21).

Week One: History from Below

The first week of PEL covers the following subject areas: 'Effective Speaking', 'Standing Committees' and 'Labour History'. But the bulk of the week is devoted to 'Human History', which gives participants an overview of the following topics: Basic concepts of class, Egalitarian (hunting and gathering society, The agricultural 'revolution', Additional basic concepts, Slave mode of production, Feudalism and Capital and the profit motive.295

In this section, the opening chapter asks:

What would human history look like if told through the eyes of and in the interests of working people? That's our central question. To tackle such a big issue, we first have to develop some basic concepts of social analysis to guide our discussion.296

Rather than begin with a bland retelling of labour history, the first PEL module begins with a Marxist framework for social analysis. Saul noted that:

[al]though Marx is not mentioned in the text these concepts combine to forge a 'system of exploitation' that is, essentially, Marxist."297

For example, the PEL explanation of the characteristic Marxist concept of "surplus value" is as follows:

The difference between the value created by living labour and the necessary consumption of the workers is SURPLUS-VALUE. The rate of surplus-value is a measure of the degree of exploitation of the working-class.298

This corresponds to an uncanny degree with Marx's assertion in Capital, that:

[d]uring the second period of the labour-process, that in which his labour is no longer necessary labour, the workman, it is true, labours, expends labour-power; but his labour, being no longer necessary labour, he creates no value for himself. He creates


surplus-value which, for the capitalist, has all the charms of a creation out of nothing. This labour expended during that time, I give the name of surplus-labour.\textsuperscript{299}

Marxist concepts such as social reproduction, process of material production, means of production, the law of social reproduction, necessary consumption, use value, social relations of production and mode of production are briefly explained in the course text. One interview respondent reported that in this section, PEL provided him with an explanation of:

capitalism, a true definition of what capital was — that opened up a lot of people’s eyes, it really did.\textsuperscript{300}

Another respondent confirms this experience and adds that her trust of corporate media in particular had diminished considerably, she said that:

..well they taught about the class societies and the way.. businesses and media — media was the big one — how media can change things around to benefit themselves or whoever it is that’s powerful at that moment and ... I never looked..I don’t look at the paper in the same, same way that I used to.\textsuperscript{301}

Next, a lengthy section comprises an explanation of hunter-gatherer societies and poses some questions and answers which are intended to illustrate that an alternate way of being is possible. A series of challenging questions and statements are posed to participants, such as:

(1) Life must have been hell for these hunters and gatherers, constantly living on the edge of starvation, eking out a minimal subsistence diet. (2) But what about the diet? We must eat better than they did. (3) I don’t know how I would cope without my leisure time on the weekend. (4) How could women be the primary producers? What about childrearing? asks the male chauvinist who remains unconvinced. (6) There’s nothing I hate more than having to move. (7) Storage: "Saving for a Rainy Day"? (8) Accumulation and Hoarding: "Keeping up with the Joneses?"\textsuperscript{302}

These statements are responded to in a way which reassures the participants that: hunter-

\textsuperscript{299}Marx (1967: 209).

\textsuperscript{300}Interview PEL06.596.

\textsuperscript{301}Interview PEL02.496.

gatherer societies were more than bare subsistence communities, there was much time for leisure activities and that there was little need to hoard foodstuffs, food gathering was an intermittent activity interspersed with play, that the sexual division of labour was largely nonexistent, in fact, "(female) gathering activities actually provide a greater proportion of the total diet than (male) hunting activities." In short, a number of modern fables about communal, precapitalist, societies — as well as a number of essentialist fictions which play on gender myths — are shattered. Continuing on the theme of how hunter-gatherers were a nomadic people who lived collectively and would be hampered by excess goods, the next section, entitled "Accumulation and Hoarding: 'Keeping up with the Joneses?'" poses a challenge to modern-day PEL participants, which turns their (our) prevailing common sense on its head:

- Smaller is better than larger,
- Simpler is better than complex,
- Fewer is better than more...
- As long as there is enough for everyone!

Following these social 'rules' not only makes mobility much easier, but it also strengthens the social relations of production built around the principle of equality.

The PEL manual continues in this vein at some length, tallying the lack of need for accumulation that some societies, such as the !Kung, the Mi’Kmaq and the Yahgan, experienced. In sum, the section's key point is perhaps best expressed in this passage:

To turn our value system upside down, humanity for 99% of our history would probably have said:
- one is enough and certainly better than two
- what is mine is ours and what is not ours cannot be mine or yours.

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Effective Speaking

PEL participants are also taught effective public speaking. This is undertaken in part to bolster CAW members' confidence at union meetings and other public gatherings. As one participant said:

I think it set out to, to open people's minds, to get them more involved into their unit.306

This section of the program is aimed not only at the local union leaders, but all CAW members are expected to participate, as evidenced by the statement "[i]n the CAW, everyone has an equal right to have their say in the operation of our union."307 In a public speaking exercise, participants are first asked to lecture on a topic for several minutes and then, later in the four-week program, they are asked to deliver a more formally structured and prepared five-minute speech to their class on a particular subject. This is videotaped for later critique and collective analysis.

Participants are given several weeks to prepare for their presentation, and there is much anticipation throughout the course of the four weeks as the final moment approaches.308 This speech requires some prior groundwork and participants are expected to conduct background research on their subject in order to prepare for their presentation. This participant explained that:

I did my first ever um, I guess it was my first ... adult ... speaking course-session. I did it on a subject I didn't have enough preparation on and I ended up blowing it big-time.309

306Interview PEL02.496.


308This is based on my own PEL experience.

309Interview PEL04.496.
As a PEL participant in 1980, I found the five-minute speech a particularly unnerving exercise. Participants pulled themes out of a hat such as 'capitalism' 'communism' and 'Marxism'. The topic I had pulled was 'socialism' and facing my instructor, Dan Benedict, was a terrifying prospect for me. Moreover Benedict — fluent in several languages and a former delegate to the ILO — was undeniably an 'expert' on the subject.

I was also uneasy about appearing to know 'too much' about the subject, and worried about being labelled a radical or a 'keener' by my peers. But I headed to the public library regardless and deliberately chose several 'safe' spokespersons for socialism, such as G.B. Shaw, Leo Huberman and reggae singer Jimmy Cliff — anybody but Marx, Engels or Lenin would do.

I did choose one 'Lennon' and ended my speech with a tape recording of former Beatle John Lennon who sang:

Why in the world are we here? Surely not to live in pain and fear..”

Much to his credit, Benedict chastised me only for my apologetic introduction, in which I had begged the group's pardon excessively, excusing the weaknesses of my speech before saying even the first word about my assigned topic of socialism. Self-confidence, or the lack thereof, was another lesson I had learned at Port Elgin.

The oral evidence gathered here shows that this lesson is shared by other PEL participants:

[w]e had to do speeches, a one minute, a three-minute, a five-minute and each week you had a different class and then you had to do your speech so it was good that way, it was, gives you a little more self confidence in standing up in to — in to a public forum whatever..”

For many workers, PEL became an extremely important training ground which provides a

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310Lennon (1972).

311Interview PEL02.496.
safe atmosphere, free from the laughter of cultural elitists and naysayers. At PEL workers can spread their wings and exercise their voice.

**PEL: Union Democracy**

The democratic structure of trade unionism and the CAW in particular are also discussed during this session. There is much emphasis on the CAW Council and the local union structure.

According to Yates, the historic 1985 separation between the UAW and the CAW can be attributed crucially to the democratic organizational structure of the then-Canadian Region of the UAW, as well as a more class-based, collective identity among its members, and its anti-concessionary economic strategic direction. In contrast to the UAW which provides few intermediary structures, a democratically elected Canadian Council is a fundamental internal mechanism which endows a voice and vote to elected rank-and-file delegates. This body both debates and decides the direction of the national leadership, and played a pivotal role during the UAW-CAW split.312

The local union committees highlighted in this portion of the program include the following: bylaws, education, environment, recreation, community services, human rights, political education and women's committees. Much of the impetus for the committees emanates from the national leadership's insistence that the CAW "forge important ties with groups outside our union."313 A final topic covered during the first week of PEL embraces labour history and includes subjects such as the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919, the

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312 Livingstone, and Roth (1997: 5).

'Wobblies' and working-class resistance during the depression of the 1930s. According to the following participant the challenge of PEL was a double-edged sword: not only were the PEL participants learning new material which challenged the status quo, but they were also learning the reasons why they were taught the "wrong" view of history:

it's like what...what the way they're lookin' at it is that capitalism builds on this, right?...they [capital] want you to learn one aspect of something that suits capitalism, and they don't want you to learn the other aspects. That's the way they were puttin' it, right? That's the context that you're kinda learnin' it in, right?314

Thus, PEL participants come to differentiate and contextualize not only the history of capital, but the class relations they undergo while being educated under capital.

As stated earlier, PEL involves more than simply reading from a text. Gindin wrote that:

'education' also included films, pamphlets, union newspapers, music and even writing classes that encouraged workers to resist the dominant culture and tell their own stories.315

In addition to the techniques above, PEL brings in guest lecturers who speak from their own experiences. Some of these speakers hail from social movements and unions around the world, including: international trade unionists, anti-racist, social justice and youth activist movements, among others. Commenting on the sensation of hearing about the oppression of Latin American trade unionists, this participant said:

a guy from South America he told once about er, pulling the bodies out of mass graves, they were covered in lime and things, that was a very emotional session ...316

During week one, in an exercise in union democracy, LUDLs organize elections for a variety

314Interview PEL03.496.
316Interview PEL01.496.
of mock PEL committees such as recreation, health and safety, substance abuse, the PEL newsletter and so on. This participant added:

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..we all got active on to the committees. From several committees that you can get on ... I was on the newsletter committee. and that consisted of six of us and we basically did newsletters for each week that we were up there um, and it was for the, for the members, it was their newsletter...317
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Throughout the four weeks of PEL the history of labour music is undertaken in an obvious reassertion of working-class culture. A smattering of long-forgotten songs are reclaimed by CAW members at the twilight of their first week of Paid Educational Leave. George Hewison’s essay "Striking the Left Chord" is reproduced in the course manual, including a section which reads as follows:

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History has shown that without its own song, the workers’ movement is crippled. Organized workers in Canada have learned that their heard won economic gains can be taken away in the political arena. We are also coming to grips with the fact that our economic and political achievements are undermined if we do not enter the ideological fray. And music is all about this battle for the minds and hearts of the people.318
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This is reminiscent of Gramsci’s suggestion that before a "war of position" can be fought, a "war of manoeuvre" must be undertaken.319 That is, a culture of change is necessary before any transformative class-battle is ventured.

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The first week of PEL is thus completed and approximately 125 CAW members depart the lush surroundings of Port Elgin. As Saul wrote:
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participant leave for home on Friday afternoon having learned ... that human beings are not inherently violent or competitive., that social change is possible through struggle and that the exploitation of workers by employers ... is the motor that drives

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317Interview PEL02.496.


Week Two: The State and Evolution

Week two of PEL begins with an explanation of the (capitalist) state and the relations between the state and the capitalist ruling class. The former section includes the class background and business connections of a variety of Canadian Prime Ministers to stress the point that the bourgeoisie and the state are conspiratorially linked.\(^{321}\)

This is done in an instrumental manner, reminiscent of Miliband’s assumptions that the state is merely a tool of the capitalist class.\(^ {322}\) The discontinuity of income between those in political power and the majority of working-class Canadians is illustrated in the following passage:

Both the Conservative and Liberal Parties work hard at establishing these corporate ties through their recruitment procedures. A study of leadership conventions of these two dominant political parties in 1967 and 1968 shows their economic base in stark terms. Two-thirds of the delegates had incomes shared by only 7% of the Canadian population; 40% had incomes shared by only 2%; and 25% of the delegate strength had incomes held by only 1% of all Canadians.\(^ {323}\)

Additionally, the functions of the state are outlined, with the state seen as 'orchestrating' the ensemble of social relations much in the way established in Levin's School and Work in a Democratic State.\(^ {324}\) In an illustration of this postulate, the PEL Manual includes the historical-materialist principle that:

\(^{320}\)Saul (1994: 24).


\(^{322}\)Miliband (1969).


\(^{324}\)Carnoy and Levin (1985: 26-51).
There are three main functions carried out by all capitalist states, and the Canadian state is no exception. The state must:

(a) Create conditions that favour capital accumulation;
(b) Create a minimal level of social harmony, or legitimation;
(c) Employ coercion, when necessary, to maintain the social order.325

Next is a chapter entitled "For Them" which aims at uncovering a multitude of glutinous vices undertaken by Canada’s wealthy elites. Topics covered here vary from the "Corporate Agenda and its Consequences" to an outline of the conservative right-wing agenda and the "power of capital," from a summary of "bank profits and how they get them" to a catalogue of increasing foreign control over Canadian resources. This section is contrasted against the succeeding sub-chapter entitled "And...For Us" — "us" representing the working-class majority and the pittance enjoyed by the proletariat, which includes: wage controls, part-time work and inequality. The myth that:

we are in the midst of a massive shift from low-skill to high-skill occupations, which is driving wages upward, eventually swamping the decline in wages due to the industry shift.326

...is also challenged. Canada’s declining status as a social welfare state is addressed327 and the Swedish social-democratic model is proposed as a viable alternative to the U.S. paradigm.328 Moreover a connection is made which contends that the postwar victories of the Canadian working-class are increasingly under attack and that "inequality and corporate power has dramatically increased."329


They started on about the deficit...saying that this is a ruse, right? The deficit was there so that the ruling class in society can take away from the working-class.

A further link is established which shows that NAFTA is the cause of capital flight which is driving Canadian jobs south to the U.S. and Mexico. This is contrasted with documented evidence, garnered from a variety of sources, which shows Canadians are competitive in terms of: (a) wages; "German, Japan costs now higher than U.S. so we’re a low-cost producer," (b) quality; "Oshawa Car [plants], #1/#2: in top four of Big 3 North American plants," (c) wages and (d) competitiveness; "50% increase in assembly productivity over past dozen years."

The argument that Canada is not, and never was, "drowning in debt" comprises the next portion of PEL. A case is argued, using material from a variety of sources which includes Linda McQuaig, showing that government debt is largely at private interests’ profit. Moreover an antagonistic class position is again undertaken. CAW President Hargrove, quoted in a 1995 speech, asked:

[w]hy do we have this special "mortgage tax" [exorbitant mortgage interest rates] the banks impose on us - especially since, unlike other taxes, it serves no social purpose other than giving more of our income to those who already have so much?

The following exercise in mathematics, calculating the cost of wages, benefit packages, the cost-of-living allowance (COLA) and a lengthy session on the technicalities of the Consumer Price Index is intended to deepen understanding of the bargaining process and possibly fortify

330 Interview PEL03.496.


participants’ skills at the negotiating table.

Participants are also given a homework assignment; that of researching the gross sales and net profit of their respective employers and calculating the cost of labour in order to come to a real understanding of the labour theory of value and the amount of surplus value workers generate at their workplace, another example which shows the CAW’s use of Marxist theory in action.

The current crisis in the labour movement is also examined including the distribution, and decline of, union membership in Canada.

Week Three: Classes in Conflict

Week three of PEL challenges the fundamental belief that 'class' is something other than a relation to income, status, or job title. In an instructive exercise participants are faced with the following question:

If asked to identify your class position, how would you respond?
I/my family belongs to the _______________ class.336

A turn of the page sets up a discussion of social class viewed as a relation to the means of production. Once again, a familiar Marxist concept. The PEL manual points out that 'class' as simply a descriptive term reinforces the notion that:

everyone in our kind of society has basically the same rights and duties and obligations as everyone else; the differences between these "lumps of population" (upper, middle and lower) are a result, it seems, from greater initiative, energy, thrift or just better personal decision-making by those "at the top." Or, to repeat an old cliche, "anyone can make it if they really try."337

335This is done by obtaining corporate annual reports from one's own employer.


This is a correct replay of the "cultural deficit" model, which is used to explain what may appear as individual failures but are in fact social boundaries based on exploitative relations.

This is discussed in PEL in the following way:

[w]e want the concept of "class" to acknowledge the fact that exploitation is basic to capitalist production. This is precisely what is lacking—the notion of exploitation—in the usual sense of class that most people (including workers) have in their head. And it is no surprise that the media and the educational system do nothing to add this fact of exploitation to the notion of class.

For many participants this fact is an eye-opener. One interview respondent commented:

[w]hat PEL taught me was what the words really mean and what they really refer to, like exploitation...

In what might be considered an oversimplified and dichotomous schema, PEL sets up the relationship between the classes as those who buy the labour of others and those who labour in exchange for a wage:

Class, in a nutshell, is a concept that explains who is exploiting whom.

The earlier question, which asks the participant to identify their own class location, is resubmitted. However this time, according to the manual, a "correct" answer is expected. That is, a reply based on elementary Marxist principles.

The succeeding section opens up a discussion on the nature of class conflict and class consciousness. This is defined as the "subjective" dimension of class. According to the PEL manual, class consciousness:

concerns the extent to which a class (and it can be any class) within capitalist society

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340Interview PEL06.596.

is conscious of its class position and class interests. The real test of class consciousness is ultimately the extent to which a class is prepared to act according to those interests as a class.  

The manual advances the notion that organizations like the Business Council on National Issues (BCNI) "speaks for the largest capitalists in Canada," and is a substantial supporter of free trade.

PEL illustrates this with the fact that the BCNI paid huge sums for advertisements in favour of free trade. The manual concludes that this act is an example of the ruling class expressing its own class interests and class consciousness. Apparently the lesson was absorbed. An interview respondent noted that:

"The deficit was there so that the ruling class in society can take away from . . . the working-class."  

If the ruling class can be a 'class for itself' then what next? Discussion then centres on what working-class consciousness would resemble and the answer is succinct:

A strike often results in more than simply monetary gains or better working conditions. It also offers the possibility of rank-and-file workers to learn the importance of solidarity with each other; a strike creates a learning situation more significant than any formal educational setting or degree that is granted to individuals only. A strike is a school, a school for the working class!

Thus, the lessons of class identification, class consciousness and class conflict are starkly portrayed by the CAW's PEL program in a fairly traditional interpretation of Marxism.

The greatest contribution this section makes is the (re)definition of class as a social relationship. In an example of 'turning common-sense on its head' there is the observation

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344Interview PEL03.496.
that strikes teach working people valuable lessons about class solidarity.

Moreover, that a strike is valued as an informal lesson more valuable than an education or degree aptly demonstrates PEL's high appraisal of informal learning, a theme I will return to below. However these lessons are not always readily accepted. Of this particular PEL module, one respondent somewhat hesitantly said:

Classroom discussions, they were quite well done...the teachers, they were well-trained in what they got across for that. And um, they were very um, anti-corporation, big-time.  

Here LUDLs also discuss research statistics which show that the Canadian capitalist class represents "2.1% of the labour force." This section was recalled by another respondent this way:

it clarified or defined my situation in society and most of the people in society, there's like the top one percent who really would be considered 'the doers' the movers and the shakers, everybody else follows their lead — no matter how much they make.  

The steady rationalizations, buyouts and takeovers of corporations is explained both in video and text, leading to the conclusion of this section, which settles on the statement that:

[capitalists depend on each other, but they all ultimately depend on exploiting labour (the working class) in order to make a profit.  

A sectoral profile of the working-class is outlined next, with emphasis on similarities (potential alliances) and differences (conflicts) between a variety of workers, such as: production, construction, service, office, transportation, rural and semiprofessional-technical workers. This is also an exercise in identifying the petit bourgeoisie's class location.

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346 Interview PEL05.496.


348 Interview PEL04.496.

Gender is briefly touched on as manager-supervisors are identified as belonging largely to: "a male world."\(^{350}\) It is also noted that "the lower you go in the hierarchy, the more women you find."\(^{351}\)

The remainder of week three is concerned with further effective speaking exercises and unites on: statistics, media critique, poverty issues, sexism and racism. I will briefly focus on racism in the next section which deals with both race and immigration.

**Week Four: The Plan of Action**

Week four begins with a critical view of the political process. A scathing critique of the Reform Party, an overview of social democracy and the differences between 'business unionism' and 'social unionism' are discussed. The age-old CAW slogan is also addressed.

The manual says:

"*What you win at the bargaining table, you can lose at the ballot box.*" Gains made through collective bargaining can be taken away or watered down by laws and policies of the government of the day.\(^{352}\)

Thus CAW members are warned that they must get involved in the parliamentary process if they are to maintain negotiated entitlements. This too, is cast in a class conflict mould.

Participants are told that:

[i]n Canadian society there is a constant "tug-of-war" between business on the one hand, and working people on the other. Gains that workers have made both at the bargaining table and through political action are therefore subject to a never ending struggle by employers to limit, restrict and eliminate them. We must continue to

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defend and extend what we have won at the bargaining table and at the ballot box.\textsuperscript{353}

In addition to class rights there is also a reference to the privileges of citizenship:

One more thing — workers are also citizens. We expect — and have a right to expect — important rights as members of our larger communities. We want decent housing in livable communities at affordable prices. We want access to leisure that we can enjoy for ourselves and our families. We want quality public education for our children that enriches their lives and increases their choices for the future. We want reasonable tax burdens that allow us to fund social services but are fairly assessed and don’t unreasonably increase our cost of living.\textsuperscript{354}

Week four of PEL also deals with racism and immigration. I will attempt to give the reader a flavour of this section, although my stated goal here is primarily, though not exclusively, to examine PEL’s approaches to issues of class and class consciousness.

A variety of materials are used to spark discussion in this particularly boisterous session, including a CAW Executive Board memo which states:

[w]e are a country of immigrants. Except for the aboriginal peoples, every person in the country is a descendent of a person who, for whatever reason, made the momentous and painful decision to change homelands, to pull up deep family and cultural roots, and to launch themselves and their children into an unknown future.\textsuperscript{355}

This "self-confessed Brit" who considered himself a socialist and active trade unionist, described his initial reaction to PEL discussions around race, immigration and European colonialism:

The first ... weeks at Port Elgin disturbed me quite a lot because of the huge "bash the Europeans" especially for the first week. ... In a way they, blamed Europe for v.d. and ...wrecking the Indians.. I guess Europeans, if you stood back, they did do a lot of damage when they took over countries. But if you are a European, the first thing you do is you get your back up, right?\textsuperscript{356}

\textsuperscript{353}CAW Canada PEL Manual Vol.IV, 28.

\textsuperscript{354}CAW Canada, PEL Manual Vol.IV, 28.

\textsuperscript{355}CAW Canada PEL Manual Vol.IV, Chapter 3.

\textsuperscript{356}Interview PEL01.496.
This account provides a striking contrast to that of the following respondent, who provided an alternative view on what is clearly a contentious issue in all PEL classes:

[we] were talking about immigration and refugees, that was a big topic because there's been so many myths about it and stuff, so I noticed even and other people that I've talked with from [local] 222, their classes became quite heated also when they were talking on that issue. But it seemed when they were talking about...blacks okay? Say they were talking about, something about blacks. Well it felt like there was only two black members in my class. And they felt like they were carrying the whole weight on their shoulders. To me it felt like they had to, they were...they were backlashing towards the Irish person and trying to make him understand what was going on.357

The reader must remember that these two PEL participants were not in the same class, but rather the PEL discussions around race, ethnicity and immigration are somewhat similar from class to class — which says quite a bit about the ubiquitous dissemination of our cultural myths. However, the "Brit" participant eventually came around and noted:

I remember [PEL discussion leader] ______ ______ [... ] he grilled the 'European-born' session and he drove home that [pounds fist in hand] ... I guess your education is...you're taught that the Europeans did wonderful things ... [they were on] top of the world and gave everybody what we wanted. When in fact they were quite ruthless and...bloodthirsty.358

The following respondent cited the change in attitude that he and his fellow participants underwent during the four-week program — particularly during the sessions on race and immigration. The "primacy of first-hand experience,"359 in this case sharing PEL living accommodations and a classroom with workers of colour, had a striking effect on the following participant who expressed it this way:

[a] few black guys...they would always stick together in a little group. Well, they were convinced that everybody else was...racist against them and ostracised them ... Into the fourth week, they weren't those little groups of the Italians over here, and the Polacks

357Interview PEL02.496.

358Interview PEL01.496.

over here, and the Indians over here ... everybody saw ... that everybody was just like everybody else.360

A lesson in racial tolerance, thankfully, seems to be another accomplishment of the PEL program. The self-identified British interview respondent also took home a lasting lesson, he said:

They’ve got four weeks to change that to a point where you can look at what happened to the countries, right? And see that Europeans weren’t the best thing that ever hit, they did some marvellous things, but they weren’t the best thing that ever happened to America, South America, they weren’t the definitely best things to happen to the Canadian Indians, right? So it give you some sympathy towards the races, not sympathy, you don’t need sympathy, it’s empathy.361

At the end of the last week of PEL, these workers will have collectively learned about class, race and gender issues from a variety of alternative standpoints.

The fourth week ends with a profound sense of sadness as participants — who have worked, laughed and studied together for 22 days — prepare to part. These newly-minted PEL graduates from locals scattered across the country join together in a final, ritual graduation, complete with certificates, speeches and much celebration. The "PEL effect" will see people embrace, kiss and exchange telephone numbers. Tears are not uncommon during the final few days, as men and women prepare to leave Port Elgin one last time. Although there are possibilities for future participation in one and two-week PEL followups, these workers realize that they will never quite recreate the now-treasured PEL experience of the past four weeks.

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360Interview PEL06.596.

361Interview PEL01.A96.
PEL: Participant Viewpoints

PEL is well-known among CAW workers in Oshawa, although it is often ignored by many. At times it takes a local union official to thrust the program at rank-and-file members. When respondent PEL01 was asked how he had first heard about PEL, he replied "the drive was [my district committeeperson] _____ ____, I’d have to say that." Thus this respondent received a nudge from his district committeeperson, in this case a member of Local 222’s executive board and an outspoken advocate for more skilled trades participation in the day-to-day running of the local union. Caucus infighting was also a factor here. This skilled-trades respondent commented that this committeeperson:

"...wanted some skilled trades to go too, there’s a lot of production [workers] going to it and it’s hard to get skilled trades to go through [...] for the politics."

The respondent’s comments focus on the perceived need for skilled tradespeople to participate more fully in the daily running of their union, and PEL is viewed an important component of activism among this schooled elite.

An additional component of the CAW’s labour education is the weekend and one-day seminars held at local union halls on a variety of issues. Much of this initiative has been a direct outgrowth stemming from the demands of PEL ‘post-graduates’ who thirst for more challenging and alternative training sessions along the same lines as Paid Education Leave.

The selection of PEL participants is generally decided by a local union’s executive board which sorts through applications in order to find a candidate. There appears to be no formal criteria for selection, although some respondents were ‘recommended’ by a friendly union representative.

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*362Interview PEL01.496*

*363Interview PEL01.496*
Sometimes informal connections, such as family and friends, sped up the process. At local 222, those who apply for PEL are chosen by the Local Executive Board twice annually. When asked how she first heard about PEL respondent PEL02 replied:

Through...union representatives and through my family ... Well, my family has been quite involved within the union and within GM so I think it was like, my calling [laughs] to work there.\textsuperscript{364}

Although this respondent’s circumstance was atypical of most PEL applicants (that is, her brother and father are both local activists at Local 222), she does outline the handling of PEL applications with an insider’s view:

[M]y application went in and then it was put through the [CAW local 222] executive board and then they have to send up, they send up [to the CAW National Union Headquarters] ... I think we’re allowed thirty-one allotments or something, yeah, at local 2-2-2 so they sent up [...] twenty-one of us or so that applied for the Fall session.\textsuperscript{365}

As a measure of its immense size, in the Fall of 1995, as it does in most years, Local 222 sent one-fifth of the total compliment of 125 PEL participants to the Port Elgin, Ontario Education Centre.

Some participants, in this union historically dominated by Central Ontario’s auto industry, now come from locales as far-flung as Newfoundland and British Columbia. If nothing else serves as a measure of the CAW’s commitment to the informal learning component of PEL, the high cost of travel-related expenses should. The CAW is devoted to the principle that workers learn collectively, through informal learning both within the classroom and after classroom hours.

\textsuperscript{364}Interview PEL02.496.

\textsuperscript{365}Interview PEL02.496.
Chapter 5. PEL: An Analysis

Here I will examine PEL’s role as a unique labour education strategy within the broader framework of the CAW’s social union strategy. As it is currently practised, PEL serves as a model for lifelong workplace education and training in Canada. PEL is a form of political agitation and struggle and presents an expansion as well as an alternative to traditional union tool courses — often the primary form of labour education offered by so-called 'business unions'. CAW Assistant to the President Sam Gindin wrote that:

PEL aims at providing working people with an understanding of capitalism, their place in this system, the role of unions as independent working class organizations, the history of workers and their organizations.366

Former CAW Paid Education Leave Director Ken Luckhardt outlined the purpose of the program as follows:

..the overall objective is to give workers the confidence to participate in the union and in their society to try to implement progressive social change.367

Over the 19 years of its existence, PEL’s coordinators have moved from an initial conviction that workers must get involved almost exclusively with parliamentary politics, to a more widespread view that members "..become involved in the struggle for social change.."368

Broadly speaking, however, the CAW position on its education programs has been consistently as follows:

All of our programs and courses carry a very basic message: our union can, and should be, the vehicle for social change [my emphasis] and improvement in the lives of all workers.369

368CAW (1996a: 2).
While national CAW leaders work to raise political consciousness, local union leadership almost invariably drifts toward trade union economism. Livingstone and Seccombe wrote that former Soviet revolutionary leader:

[V.I.] Lenin made a distinction between economic (or trade union) consciousness and political class consciousness. Economic consciousness, he said, was generated by "the collective struggle of the workers against their employers for better terms in the sale of their labour power." Political class consciousness originated "outside the sphere of relations between workers and employers ... in the sphere of relationships of all classes and strata to the state and the government." 370

Accordingly the national leadership of the Canadian Auto Workers cannot be accused of following in the footsteps of simple trade union economism. Related to this is Lenin's distinction that:

Trade unionism does not exclude "politics" altogether, as some imagine. Trade unions have always conducted some political agitation and struggle. 371

This is echoed by Gindin who calls for what he calls 'movement unionism', which he described as:

a unionism that is workplace-based, community-rooted, democratic, ideological, and committed to building the kind of movement that is a precondition for any sustained resistance and fundamental [political] change. 372

Indeed, PEL goes well beyond the traditional boundaries of "political agitation" and economism settled upon by the majority of North American unions. PEL clearly is a form of "political agitation and struggle" and presents a viable alternative to traditional union tool courses, the hallmark of so-called business unions. In fact, the PEL manual makes reference to "business unionism" as:


..an approach that *limits* [my emphasis] union activity to collective bargaining. Business Unionism is primarily concerned with getting "more" for one group of workers ... It seldom encourages (or allows) members to get involved in social and political issues in the name of, or under the banner of the union. For business unionists, the organized working class has no reason to act as an independent force in politics.373

A notion combining both economic unionism and political activity — social unionism — is envisioned by the CAW leadership. While it is true that unions can operate within an economist framework, and many do, unions which exercise social unionism must do double duty: they have to satisfy the economic needs of their membership as well as act politically in support of progressive causes.

CAW President Buzz Hargrove is not reserved in enunciating his views of social unionism. He wrote that:

Social unionism stresses the broad well-being of all working people, not just the narrow economic interest of our own members. It positions the union movement not as a narrow "special interest," but as an economic and political weapon that can be wielded on behalf of all workers, and all the downtrodden.374

The CAW’s view of itself as more than a narrow self-interest group bodes well for its future. Perhaps this stems from the recognition that this may prove to be the key to their longevity, but the history and record of this union shows that the CAW’s progressive nature is more likely rooted in a genuine effort to establish a grassroots form of social movement unionism.

If the labour movement wishes to continue into the next century with a record of growth and diversity rather than the stagnation and decline which accompanies inbreeding, it must bridge the growing gap that exists between unionized workers with secure employment

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and those in the marginalized working-class.\textsuperscript{375} As Livingstone and Seccombe put it, the former group experiences "integrated subordination" and the latter are the "marginalized underclass."\textsuperscript{376} Since, in the North American context, the former group is shrinking and the latter is expanding, organized labour must adapt to the realities of a shifting economy simply in order to avoid succumbing to the twin onslaught of globalization and technology.

Subordinated classes and groups view 'do-gooders' from a different plane and according to Livingstone and Seccombe:

[t]hey are normally in the best position to observe the discrepancy between rhetoric and reality. This accounts, in part, for the widespread disdain that shop-floor workers have for the front-office manager, women have for men's domestic opinions, ghetto residents have for "do-good" reformers, and "practical" working-class people have for academics "in their ivory towers."\textsuperscript{377}

This speaks directly to the power of the union 'do-gooder' and the well-meaning academic alike. As one Working-class Learning Strategies respondent addressed the issue:

I really don’t think there’s going to be any [systemic] change that’s going to solve anything. \textit{Interviewer:} No? It’s [the interview] a Doctor Dolittle approach. All these questions, the Doctor Dolittle questions. \textit{Interviewer:} I don’t know what you mean. ..The, the questions themselves are black and white, they ask...th... like, the...they’re looking, they’re assuming already, they’re justified in asking that question. Like to start with, I’d throw this fucking thing [questionnaire] out, like you shouldn’t have any right to ask these questions. \textit{Interviewer:} Why not? 'Cause they give up too much, if a person answers these ... they’ve given up too much of their own personal privacy.\textsuperscript{378}

In this case, the power of the interviewer and the "Doctor Dolittle approach," was justifiably questioned. Of course, many university researchers who engage in work with 'dispossessed

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\textsuperscript{375}See Gindin (1997).
\textsuperscript{376}Livingstone and Seccombe (1996).
\textsuperscript{377}Livingstone and Seccombe (1996: 174).
\textsuperscript{378}WCLS interview O8ARR1.A96.
groups are already aware of the disproportionate share of power they enjoy.

Given this perspective, the CAW might consider expanding its ideologically-based education programs into non-unionized and non-waged sectors of society with some awareness of the union's own power over those whom they claim to serve and the justified suspicion of their constituencies.

Through the CAW's growing connections with social justice coalitions, the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and their links to regional labour councils across the country, some of these wider community ties are already being realized.

Commenting on the expansion of PEL to a broader community, Philips explained that:

..we're talking about expanding it, we're talking about ..I mean, the program has been around for quite a while so we're always revisiting it. We're talking about directly making connections between grassroots of the Paid Education Leave program and the community..starting to stress their need to not only aspire to traditional leadership positions in the union, but also to go back to 30s style organizing methods..which is talking face-to-face to coworkers. Talking to coworkers about issues that are of immediate interest to those workers in the workplace. Talking to them where they are.

Moreover, Gindin cited the CAW's pivotal role during Ontario's "Days of Action" protests during 1995-96. The CAW would be well advised to expand a series of broad PEL-like education programs into these, and other similar, community arenas. PEL for teenagers and children, PEL for spouses, PEL for community activists and PEL for teachers would be an expensive, but fruitful application of members' dues-dollars. Already the CAW can see

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380 See for example, Clifford and Marcus (1986).

381 See Quarter (1992).

beyond the traditional 'economic unionism' that hinders many of their peers, however, persuading their members that extending their franchise beyond their current constituents is both a worthy and wholly possible, exercise.

Certainly PEL is a program that, in today's context, is not an absolutely necessary one. The CAW, like many of its peers, can presumably thrive for some time to come resting solely on an economist program of simply 'doing well' for its own members — a Gomperian precept. That the CAW chooses a more difficult path is a testament to the this union’s commitment to working-class democracy, a concern more vital than even the highest ideals of trade unionism.

**PEL as a "transformative" experience**

In recent studies, the Finish sociologist Ari Antikainen relates what he terms "significant learning experiences." That is, those events which redirect one’s life course. Antikainen wrote that:

> [a] life-story may include distinct turning points of educational and learning biographies. These turning points we ... call "significant learning experiences." We defined these experiences in relation to life-course and identity as follows: significant learning experiences are those which appeared to guide the interviewee's life-course, or to have changed or strengthened his or her identity [my emphasis].

From my own standpoint PEL was in fact such an experience. As an electrical assembly worker at DeHavilland Aircraft from 1980-82, I was among those chosen by my union to attend PEL in its second year of existence. It was a seminal personal episode which helped me to understand power relations as I experienced them in everyday life. After the

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disheartening ordeal of searching for employment during the recession of the early eighties, PEL provided a framework which explained class society to me in a life-altering manner. As Antikainen said:

Significant learning experiences can mean empowerment especially if we use as indicators of empowerment the three factors proposed in our research plan: the expansion of a interviewee’s world-view or cultural understanding; the strengthening of one’s "voice" so that he or she has the courage to participate in dialogue or even break down the dominant discursive forms; and the broadening of the field of social identities or roles.\(^{385}\)

Even approaching PEL as I did in 1980, with a rudimentary understanding of Marx, surplus value and socialism, it was an epiphany. The form of PEL, as well as its content, was a significant demonstration of how workers' consciousness might be deepened.

For me, PEL was an indicator of how education might play a key role in the transformation of society. PEL was my \textit{practical} introduction to the Freirian concept of 'conscientizacao', that is, the concept of learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality.\(^{386}\) On the necessary prerequisite for this, which is "the conviction of the necessity for struggle,"\(^{387}\) Freire wrote that:

\begin{quote}
..the oppressed ... must reach this conviction as Subjects, not as objects. They also must intervene critically in the situation which surrounds them and whose mark they bear ... a revolutionary leadership must..practice co-intentional education ... through common reflection and action..\(^{388}\)
\end{quote}

But, in a cautionary note, Newman warned that Freire’s work, as influential and relevant to

\(^{385}\)Antikainen (1996).

\(^{386}\)Freire (1970: ff.19).

\(^{387}\)Freire (1970: 54).

\(^{388}\)Freire (1970: 54-56).
trade union training as it is, has been misinterpreted by many as a methodology. Instead, Newman argues, Freire gave us a philosophy. Moreover, we must avoid "falling into the trap of adopting Freire's philosophy as an ideology." He maintained that Freire simply gives us a "framework within which we can develop our own ideas."

In "Popular Education and Working Class Consciousness: A Critical Examination of the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour's Workers' Education for Skills Training Program," Lori Stinson-O’Gorman comments on the gulf that exists between consciousness-raising programs in the Third World versus those in North America:

> While popular education has proven to be an effective means of struggle in the nations of the periphery, as of yet it has not been pursued in any meaningful way in North America.\(^{391}\)

I believe that Stinson-O’Gorman has overlooked PEL as a form of popular education which mobilizes workers. The CAW program is not the only one which has been omitted by O’Gorman, other labour bodies\(^ {392}\) and trade unions either have their own, more modest, consciousness-raising programs, participate in PEL education classes or share facilities at the CAW Education Centre.\(^ {393}\)

### On the Unease of 'Dangerous' Knowledge

PEL's transformative potential still cannot resolve the unease that workers feel when

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\(^{392}\)Such as the Canadian Labour Congress and the Ontario Federation of Labour.

\(^{393}\)Spencer (1994: 54-56).
confronted with this new, unheard-of, contradictory information. There is a problem in discussing PEL's ideological assertions with others who have not been exposed to the PEL experience. This participant revealed his reaction to some of these internal, deep-rooted feelings. He began with a common-sense question, echoing the manner of PEL's LUDLs:

..how can one guy build the railway? and yet all you hear in the media is so-and-so, this is the anniversary of so-and-so built the railway across Canada. Stuff like that. 394

But this participant ends with a sorrowful thought: the impossibility of resolving a lifetime of 'legitimate knowledge' with this contradictory, newly-acquired knowledge, he said that:

..they [PEL] get at the fundamental things that you were taught, they get right in there and they play...they get their finger in there and [scrapes fingernail on table] give it a stir right? an'...it does play with your emotions at first, 'cause you're wonderin' ... "am I gettin' into something that is going to ..affect me like, fundamentally? If I take a fundamental shift in my own beliefs ... it would be almost like exposing yourself as a dummy, right? 395

This respondent's reluctance to 'let go' his years of formal schooling, and hence be viewed as a "dummy", reveals a crack which is really an unrecognized (on his part) class process. As Shor 396 has revealed, the lack of confidence upon which working-class learners bank their formal school knowledge, especially the liberal arts, may originate in:

..working-class language, thought, culture and experience [which] are antagonistic to the genteel ambience of academe 397 ... [where] [a]cceptable and unacceptable knowledge is decided by the teacher's responses and by the books the teacher assigns ... [and a] humanities teacher's linguistic style can retard student thought as effectively as the de-politicized vo-tech courses. 398

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394 Interview PEL03.496.

395 Interview PEL06.596.


Another respondent put it this way:

they tried to take away some of the myths that, that are set out to us within media and television and even stuff we’ve learned in high school, I mean on history and they’ve just tryin’ to take some of those myths away gave you another way to look at it.399

PEL has developed a substantial following within the CAW. Many of its graduates have, according to Saul, have moved on to assume leadership positions within the union, becoming elected committeepersons, plant chairpersons and executive members. Further, as stated above, the CAW has taken a leading role within the Canadian labour movement and reached out to social justice organizations and community groups.400 It is doubtful that this can be attributed solely to PEL training, but the CAW does enjoy a significant stature within both the progressive and labour movements. It might be argued that, with over 4,000 informed PEL graduates spread across the country, the CAW’s share of respect and influence may be attributed in part to its active role and commitment in educating its membership. PEL’s in-class discussions allow working-people to think through and clarify many issues relevant to their lives in an atmosphere which is open and democratic.

I can attest to the fact that PEL gave me the confidence to speak out at union and community gatherings. My PEL experience has been shared by many others. PEL was the first time I had returned to a classroom since a curtailed CEGEP (community college) career. At PEL I had to write an essay for the first time in many years. But I noticed that the majority of PEL participants simply reenacted their (bad) school experience. They preferred a different kind of knowledge.

In the course of explaining his experience in a PEL class, the following respondent

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399 Interview PEL02.496.

400 Such as Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, which receives CAW support.
discussed the resistance he met while giving an in-class critique of how sports is a 'distraction’ to working-people:

I was telling people that I agreed with this movie we had, and we even got into Chomsky there a little bit, and they would not admit to this being true. It can’t be 'cause it’s too important to them, but if you take a look and you’re talking to them about any other topic, they knew nothing about it, but boy, did they know football, or did they ever know baseball. And it opened up a lot of their eyes. They...it made them think, it forced them to think. I don’t know how much it opened them, but it forced them to think about it.401

Obviously there was some resistance to the counter-hegemonic message delivered by Chomsky. But that Chomsky is being discussed by workers in a collective, critical context is itself somewhat uncommon. In this case the respondent made the observation that [male] workers’ concerns are deflected and captivated by sports lore, he noted:

.. a lot of brain power going into ERAs, batting averages, how long a football field is in what league, who’s got what and what he had ten years ago or at the same time I’ll talk to someone about...anything else: politics, health and safety ... they know nothing. Now there’s an ... old ..proverb: "Everybody’s got a cup. First you have to empty it before you can put good stuff inside it." ... Here we...all these people, they’re completely filled up with sports and their brains don’t seem to be able to hold ..either don’t hold the information, or they don’t hold trust in any other kind of information. And that’s sort of makes 'em great jocks.402

This participant’s quote is a wonderful illustration of visual arts instructor, Judith Williamson’s, problem.

Williamson wrote about the difficulties of teaching the concept of ideology to a classroom of visual arts students who are so clearly formed by ideology. So why, according to this worker, do PEL participants not 'connect’ their own shop-floor experiences with the in-classroom lessons of PEL? Why do they find solace in the pleasures of sport instead? The answer might be found in people’s dread of living in a ‘socially constructed’ world.

401Interview PEL06.596.

402Interview PEL06.596.
Williamson wrote about the moment when she 'saw' ideology:

[F]or a while felt that I saw through everything I had trusted as 'true', I felt I didn’t exist as the person I’d thought I was because I was a construct of social ideas, and I wandered around like a lost soul, in a see-thru’ world. Then I finally grasped the nettle of trying to keep two things in the mind at once — the sense of reality necessary for reasonably sane living."\(^{403}\)

This sounds like one possible explanation of the respondent’s statement that workers "don’t hold trust in any other kind of information." PEL participants who can "see ideology" and their participation in it can be both frightened and confused. Sports has a clarity that political life does not and is therefore deemed more trustworthy' than politics or economic life:

..as far as anything else that’s goin’ on why the banking system works the way it does..ripoffs on service charges, I’ve been an environmental activist for years, I know what, what difference it makes to close down the Third Marsh [local to Oshawa] and whole ecosystem up around here..none of that. Seems to me there’s not enough room. Now that, got really heated inside the classrooms.\(^{404}\)

A minority of PEL participants escape the evening activities at Port Elgin in too much social drinking. This participant mentioned the mistaken impression that sometimes reaches the average lineworker back home, he claimed that the:

..general opinion of PEL is 'party' ... 'cause they see only union reps goin' up there like elected reps, and they come back with hangovers, an' great stories. Like, that's all they talk about. They don't talk about what they actually learn there and what goes on in the class very often ... It would depend on the individual, but from what I've been able to see...they're actually afraid of what you learn up there.\(^{405}\)

The CAW leadership acknowledges the 'dangers' inherent in informing relatively underprivileged workers the extent of their vulnerability. Philips recognized that:

if we [CAW] become part of convincing people that in the long run, between the

\(^{403}\)Williamson (1981-2).

\(^{404}\)Respondent PEL06.596.

\(^{405}\)Interview, PEL06.596.
broader media having control of the message, multinational corporations and financial markets controlling social programs and governments being useless, ultimately we disempower everybody by telling them that in fact, all they can do is demonstrate, all they can do is rattle their chains a little, it becomes extremely disempowering.406

This may also be an acknowledgement that PEL’s reliance on a narrow reading of Marxism makes some traditional errors and downplays the scope of agency and the possibility for a successful battle against the prevailing structures of capital.

Polymorphous Protest

During the tenure of the Ontario New Democratic Party (NDP) government of Bob Rae, from 1990-1995, PEL moved from the heavy reliance on the parliamentary process. This was a government characterized by the clash with its own constituency: the labour movement.407

The PEL of my past emphasized that members’ political involvement was to be almost solely through via activity in the (social democratic) NDP. However, the close relationship between the UAW/CAW and the NDP largely ended during the social contract battle of 1993. At the height of the social contract campaign, in 1995, Canadian Auto Workers President Buzz Hargrove told the CAW council:

..we left the UAW after 50 years, 50 years of solid support for international trade unionism, because they started moving in the direction of concessions and moving closer to the corporations and away from their roots. So surely we’re not going to support a political party that moves away from its roots and does the same thing after we divided our union because of the struggle of working people in this nation. [...] If we can’t get by this arrogance, this arrogance that’s saying to us "I told you so," well I could be standing up here...saying "I told you so [former Premier] Bob [Rae], I told you if you moved to the right, if you started attacking workers you give their enemies an absolute license to attack workers, and that’s what you did when you brought in the


407For a more complete portrayal of this period, see Panitch (1993).
In practical terms this means that PEL’s ideological leanings have shifted somewhat from parliamentary action and moved closer toward mass protest.

In fact, since 1995, the CAW has moved from working within traditional electoral and political party politics to taking an active part in the formation and work of regional Social Justice Committees in Ontario, holding demonstrations at various government Ministries, corporate head offices and financial institutions. This change in focus has been mirrored in the CAW’s activist and educational work which also advocates non-parliamentary activities of the sort mentioned above. As outlined by a CAW staffer:

The problematic [sic] in the past, is I think we didn’t talk about — or enough about — the relationship between parliamentary and extra-parliamentary politics. [...] But we’ve been forced to do that by changes that have taken place in society. We also talk about coalition work and what we should be doing outside...when we get back [from PEL] and that’s what we’re really debating right now, in terms of how best to do that, to get people involved...it’s not by signing a [NDP membership] card, but by getting involved.\footnote{Telephone interview with unnamed CAW staff representative, August, 1995.}

But at the same time, in 1995, there also was a more moderate recognition that a position should embrace both forms of activity Education Director Philips said that:

\[w\]e have to emphasize parliamentary alternatives as well as extra-parliamentary alternatives. Also because we believe in them. We believe in a democratic society, uneven as our powers may be, there are some alternatives here and governments have to be held accountable.\footnote{Philips interview, 1995.}

Today the CAW has found a comfortable political middle-ground which lies between support of the NDP and extra-parliamentary action.

\footnote{Buzz Hargrove, CAW Council Minutes, Dec. 8-9-10, 1995, 57.}
Chapter 6. Conclusion: Recommendations and Next Steps

Ours is an anti-corporate perspective, a socialist perspective — almost. But certainly it's a trade union perspective, it's a struggle perspective.

-CAW National Staff Representative, Herman Rosenfeld⁴¹¹

The story of PEL paints a hopeful picture of the bargaining-table boundaries which trade unions can cross, given enough determination, leadership and membership support. In the case outlined here, the CAW negotiated well beyond the minimum entitlements which are specified in legislation.

Therefore, despite the belief that the power of unions has been steadily waning since the postwar era, this case study provides some evidence to the contrary.

A more recent example of the CAW's ability to bargain above the minimum, is that of the union's 1996 negotiations in the auto industry. In this case the CAW, as well as all Ontario workers, was faced with the Conservative government's stated intention of disembowelling almost a century of health and safety legislation. Consequently in the 1996 auto contract talks, the CAW successfully negotiated a 'health and safety freeze' with the big three automakers. Today, Ontario's regulatory shifts in the field of workplace health and safety no longer affects CAW autoworkers who have bargained for:

..health and safety laws as they existed before the election of the Harris government in Ontario.⁴¹²

This is an illustration that in many of the workplaces it represents, the CAW has effectively lifted itself above state regulation intended to 'protect' the majority of workers.

Gindin reminds us that "the goal of politics is to democratize the economy,"⁴¹³ and

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⁴¹¹Telephone interview with Herman Rosenfeld, August 1995.


the goal of unions is, likewise, to regulate the power of employers in the workplace. The CAW has extended the traditional trade union role of protecting workers' wallets to protecting the class identification of workers from the hegemony of capital.

PEL has bestowed exemplary ideological, working-class education upon the majority of CAW members. It carries on in the best tradition of the Workers' Educational Association where "workers emphasized the need for social justice and attacked the limits of education in a class society."\(^{14}\)

The PEL story also reminds us of the power of trade unions and the labour movement. It informs us that no other institution which represents disenfranchised members of society comes closer to challenging the awesome power of capital.

Although it is difficult to be critical of such a laudable program, there are several areas which should be subject to review. One weakness of PEL is that it may cater to those who are comparatively overschooled, such as skilled tradespersons and workers in their twenties and thirties. This is also reflected in the classroom practice of expecting participants to read long passages from the PEL manual aloud. For those who lack confidence in their scholastic abilities this expectation is an anxiety-inducing practice of the highest order. Although, to be sure, participants may bypass the shared readings, this practice is still weighted in favour of the formally educated.

Informal learning, it should be noted, is nonetheless highly regarded in PEL. However there is a sense, echoed in the interview material, that PEL 'preaches' to its participants and does not give them an opportunity to voice their own, sometimes contradictory, experiences.

I brought a few things up ... but there was a lot of ... one person was speaking and then three or four of them would jump at you ... I was jumped at, so I...learned to just

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\(^{14}\)Radforth and Sangster, 77.
listen and take my own thoughts in on that, 'cause it was very um, that week it was very negative for me.\textsuperscript{415}

Of course, this experience is variable, subject to the participants' message (which may be racist or sexist) and highly dependant on the individual ability of the LUDLs leading the discussion. It is likely the exception and not the rule, but the sense that participants were occasionally 'shut down' during group discussion was alluded to by several interview respondents.

Related to the over-reliance on formal education is the observation that in actual practice PEL is not as thoroughly participatory as it claims to be. While PEL attendees are far from mere "consumers of knowledge,"\textsuperscript{416} Saul recounted one LUDL's revealing comments:

> I think there are areas you rely completely on the workers' experience — when you get down to shopfloor questions, tactics, grievances, union structures and committees, but when you are dealing with things like history, racism, class and the state, there is just no way you can do it without having the material there.\textsuperscript{417}

This belief, which is echoed in the course content (via the text and actual practice), reaffirms the knowledge of workers in one sphere, the workplace. Yet it is a denial of people's expertise outside their job, in the world in which they live. There is little doubt that these same workers and participants have experiences and thoughts on history, race, class and the state which are as equally valid as their shopfloor encounters.

Thus the four PEL manuals are heavy — both literally heavy and heavily biased in favour of the literate and the schooled. I am certain that my own 'success' at PEL (and my

\textsuperscript{415}Interview PEL05.496.

\textsuperscript{416}Saul (1994: 27).

\textsuperscript{417}Saul (1994: 28).
return invitation to the two-week followup three years afterward) was due to my 'literacies' and my own, informally acquired, cultural capital. But the creative capacity and independent knowledge-gathering of workers is partially ignored by the PEL curriculum and this is reflected in classroom practices. Even in the open atmosphere of PEL, some working-class people are marginalized, albeit to a modest degree.

The reader should note that PEL is currently being rewritten to, for example, better suit those without paper-and-pen literacy. Sectoral versions of PEL (such as "Auto-PEL") are expected to reduce the long text on history and replace this with more 'relevant' material. I am not suggesting that history be withdrawn, I only recommend that the pedagogy exhibit more respect for the indigenous knowledge of working people.

Another recommendation stems directly from the experience of this impatient activist, who said that:

> there's too much of a time gap, like after PEL, I come to these [weekend local union] seminars and they're still not up on their information. They know about it, sometimes just superficially, but if I'm learning more from the same places they told me to avoid, The [Toronto] Star and the [Toronto] Sun..then there's gotta-- there's a hell of a jag [gap] out there. There's..there's..it's too much of a —again it's REacting..19

This demonstrates that PEL can truly be successful at sparking a desire to participate in social change. However, the post-PEL follow-up at the local union level may be found wanting. This is a situation which doubtless varies from local to local, depending on the level of community and union activity. For example, the CAW's Essex-Kent Political Action Committee organized a series of bank protests around Windsor, Ontario during the summer of 1995. These protests were concerned with excess bank profits, as well as the closing of

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418See Bourdieu (1984) and for a critique of see Livingstone (1997a).

419Interview PEL06.596.
branches in working-class neighbourhoods.

As noted earlier, PEL members are also active within the various regional "Days of Action" committees which dot Ontario. But this PEL participant had a plan:

One thing...I tried to get them to focus more on is, [if] you’re pissed at the banks, okay, this is what the banks are doin’, this is the worst one, focus on them. Boycott that one, move all your money out of this one [and] into that one. And that [complaint] came out um, in more than one class from more than one person.420

"That complaint" is the critique from various PEL activists (during the course of the program and after its conclusion, in this case) that there are few outlets for social action. According to this respondent, the bank boycott he encouraged was not suggested by CAW LUDLs or the course material, but was an idea solely of his own making. On a heartening note, this respondent seems to have elicited support for his boycott proposal from his discussion group peers. He also intimated that others in his class were impatient and were eager to take part in some social protest activity.

In his thesis, Saul tells us that CAW Local 199’s solution to finding an outlet for recent PEL graduates is to send a letter of congratulations from the local union leader. The laudatory letter ends with the statement:

The question now is which direction should be taken to utilize the information and concepts we have learned for the benefit of our union and our community.421

This underlines my point that the CAW truly has the potential to be a community of workers engaged in learning and solidary action around economic and social justice issues. However, the responsibility lies with the local union leadership and political action and education committees to continue this process. This is a crucial component if the CAW is to retain a

420 Interview PEL06.596.

421 Letter from the Chairman of the Local 199 Education Committee to PEL graduates in Saul (1994: 37).
vigorous and dynamic activist core within their rank-and-file membership. The notion of a letter soliciting PEL graduates to local community action should be adopted by all CAW locals.

The implications of extending a PEL-like program to other workplaces and sites are indeed enormous. Working-Canadians could conceivably take advantage of any nonformal course of study which interests them. With the help of a Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition program which recognizes 'life experience' and awards college or university credits accordingly, union members might extend their current informal interests into credited courses and eventual certification.

Of course there are those who will not be enticed into pursuing nonformal education programs of any kind, despite state and institutional incentives to promote credentialization. However, these individuals will no doubt continue to pursue a course of informal learning, as will those who seek other forms of nonformal education. A comprehensive paid education leave program would encompass those Canadians who are not currently participating in paid employment as well.

A nationally-mandated program of Paid Education or Skilled Development Leave is the next logical step. The ILO 140 recommendations should be undertaken as the basis for a Canadian Federal policy of paid education leave. This national program should be funded jointly by both employers and the federal government.

However, unlike the example of Sweden, where a division of the respective responsibilities of employers and unions is a matter to be bargained-for in each workplace, I suggest that this separation of responsibilities either be mandated federally or negotiated by

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422 See WCLS (1997).
sector.

As noted in the European example, we can see that without a wholehearted commitment to tripartitism, PEL would not have been established as a national program in many European nations. The conclusion here is that there must be a rededication to the three major parties, labour, government and business, working in a collaborative effort to establish a national program.

I believe that a re-examination of several specific *Learning a Living in Canada* (1984) recommendations are in order, for example, the re-implementation of "Education Officers" as called for by this commission, should be considered as the next, crucial stage. These officers could advance education as a right, promoting nonformal educational opportunities in the workplace and, dealing with management on workers' behalf to "influence the types of training offered." An education officer, combined with a PLAR program granting credit for informal experience both on and off the job, could potentially thrust PEL to another phase: a nationally recognized and credited program which would earn the respect of workers and, in turn, educational, degree-granting institutions.

However I must stress that any future PEL program must remain in control of the union in all respects, including content, form and the peer-teaching element. The CAW's insistence in this regard, retaining control of the program, is perhaps one of the most commendable features discovered in this study.

The PEL program does overlook some critical social and pedagogical considerations in its attempt to confer ideological knowledge to workers. For Judith Williamson, the traditional sociological method of attempting to teach social analysis without reflecting on personal

\[423\text{National Advisory Council on Skill Development (1984: 17).}\]
experience, is a futile undertaking. She wrote that:

Unless you can find any analogous situation in their own experience, and make it problematic for them — they will never really grasp the ideological relation between 'text' and 'reader'.

In my own working-experience in an auto plant, discussing exploitation and alienation with fellow line-workers in an abstract way is certainly possible. Yet talking about their own lives in a particular context, it is difficult to convince lineworkers of their daily participation in class, ideology and struggle — the very lessons that PEL teaches.

In a Polyanna-ish attempt to 'convert' workers to view capitalism as their 'enemy', many well-intentioned progressives make the mistake of assuming that:

'we' have the answers, which we will take to the people so that 'they' will see the wisdom of 'our' wisdom, and lo! be converted.

This not only creates a self-satisfying dichotomy of benefactor and victim, an offense to the people it purports to 'help', but it insultingly assumes the victim 'needs' befriending. Moreover, these good deeds may have the effect of satisfying the benefactor's needs more than the victim's. There smacks an element of sectarianism here which potentially alienates workers from their own union.

PEL sometimes operates under the assumption that workers need only be exposed to a smorgasbord of progressive, left ideology and "lo" workers will be converted. Unfortunately this kind of short-term ideological work is unlikely to have a lasting effect. But as the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci wrote, we need "pessimism of the intellect, and optimism of the


That is, we need to be ruthlessly critical of the existing order with which history has damned us and need to be:

wildly passionate and [have a] hopeful conviction that the enormous powers of human creativity and ingenuity could be put to different ends.427

The progressive side of the trade union movement at times participates in cultivating political awareness in only the most peripheral of ways, often expecting workers to instinctively understand how they fit into class as an 'oppressed group' alongside the ranks of women, visible minorities, gays and lesbians.

On the contrary, unionized (largely male and white) industrial workers generally do not see themselves as a persecuted group — it is no wonder why: within the context of modern society they are a relatively privileged group.

In my own experience, white male industrial workers rarely perceive themselves as a cohesive group at all. Yet this does not deter many in trade union leadership positions who expect their members to attend, en masse, the multitude of labour-sponsored demonstrations which profess support for a number of dispossessed groups. In reality, when the inevitable result is the apparent scarcity of workers at a given rally or demonstration, progressives and labour activists 'tsk' at the 'apathy' and 'stupidity' of workers.

What is evidently needed is a program like PEL, although the short four-week timeframe (and subsequent one and two-week followups) allotted to the course is hardly enough to counter the daily volley of mis-information. To its credit the CAW does not claim too much on this particular matter. While PEL is a sound initiation to counter-hegemonic ideologies, it cannot be the end of the road in terms of worker re-education.

426Gramsci (1971).

There has been a claim on the CAW’s part that PEL’s role is also intended to combat a membership drift to the right. Philips explained that:

The rise of right wing forces generally, and not only the predominance of their message, but the acceptance of a message that we have been presenting and so any leadership is going to start to worry about how effective a massive education program can be -- if in the face of it, our membership is moving away from us.\(^{428}\)

In this context, progressive labour educators may want to answer the pressing questions: can PEL change workers’ attitudes, are its lessons permanent, will its lessons stick? Are working-class consciousness, anti-racist education and lectures in gender equality lessons which must be taught and re-taught in constant opposition to the 'common sense' daily dispensed by mass media and absorbed through everyday experience?

A preliminary answer to the question "can class, race and gender consciousness be taught through a vehicle like Paid Education Leave?" might be best summed up by a General Motors worker who explained his PEL experience in the following way:

I was struggling with socialism and [...] whether socialists can be somebody who owns capital...I’d say very much so, it’s [PEL] worn off a lot now but I came back into the plant with an immense socialist vigour — especially against racism.\(^{429}\)

That this skilled trades worker whose earnings are considerably higher than average, and who "owns capital," still considers himself a socialist\(^{430}\) — and perhaps more important, an anti-racist — is a dream come true for progressive trade unionists and labour activists alike.

Paid Education Leave may be one conceivable answer (of several) to the questions posed above. But also recognize that in reference to the lessons learned at PEL, this respondent added that "it’s worn off a lot now."

\(^{428}\)Philips interview, 1995.

\(^{429}\)Interview PEL01.496.

\(^{430}\)He noted that his British background originally furnished this view.
On the issue of class consciousness the following exchange with another participant was revealing:

Interviewer: Is there a social class you'd say you belong to? Before PEL or after? [laughs] ... Before, definitely middle-class. Interviewer: You'd call yourself middle-class? Yep, but after PEL no. No, you really take a look and see what middle-class is ... Interviewer: So what do you call yourself now? I'm working-class.  

That PEL can construct an ideological shift in its participants at all cannot be fully determined here, but even if there were some small movement in that direction, the next task would be a nurturing one in the hopes of sustaining the valuable lessons learned at the foot of the CAW. Workers and progressives must draw their critique, and therefore their life's lessons, from their own everyday experience.

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431 Interview PEL06.596.
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