Union Education for Progressive Development: The Case of the Canadian Autoworkers

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The CAW’s PEL and Empowerment

• Pressure for and gain the more equitable distribution of goods within Canadian society (Navarro and Shi, 2002).
• Progressive development of Canadian society by expanding freedoms (Sen, 1999).
• The Core Program of the CAW’s PEL program is one avenue to increase worker empowerment and development as freedom in Canada by strengthening the labour movement.
The Core Program

- 4 week program
- Critical assessment of the economy, politics, and equity issues
- Biannual sessions at the CAW’s Port Elgin Training Facility
- Analytically separated the curriculum into 5 major themes: education, media, history, economy, and politics
Amartya Sen (1999)

Development - “a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy” (p. 3)

i.) political freedoms
ii.) economic facilities
iii.) social opportunities
iv.) transparency guarantees
v.) protective securities
The CAW’s PEL as Progressive Development

• CP’s curriculum offers an alternative understanding of socio-political and economic issues
• Builds confidence and strengthens membership participation
Source: Data provided by Weststar (2004).
More likely to Feel Solidarity Toward Various Groups: Percentage Change After Graduating from the Core Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Co-Workers</td>
<td>52.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Union</td>
<td>70.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Union</td>
<td>80.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>64.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canadian Labour Movement</td>
<td>68.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Labour Movement</td>
<td>56.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Data provided by Weststar (2004).
Political Freedom

• Empowering workers to directly impact decision-making governing bodies, corresponding to education for democratic citizenship (Nussbaum, 2010).

• Strengthens worker identity while finding a ‘voice’ to participate in public dialogue (Roth, 1997, 1997b).

• Undermining the “culture of silence,” increasing the capacity to scrutinise and criticise authorities (Freire (1970) as cited in Carnoy, 1974, p. 19; Sen, 1999).

• Challenge economic modes of development that undermine human capacities, the welfare state, and labour
Economic Freedom

• Understanding of economic facilities, which could alter the conditions of exchange (Sen, 1999).
• Inequity of economic entitlements
• Redistributional elements of economic growth and critiques the present allocation of resources.
• Challenge the logic of privileging competitive capital accumulation over the interests of labour and the developing of human capacities.
Social Opportunities

- The importance of continued learning
- Worker-centred educational experience
- Prioritises the linkages between individual experiences and broader economic and social justice issues
- Elevates both formal and informal knowledge of working people
- Program participants are more likely to run for elected office positions within the union (Weststar, 2006).
- The labour movement as a site for increasing the life chances for the majority of Canadians by struggling for state investment in social provisions.
Transparency Guarantees

• Increase critical thinking abilities which is tied to the maintenance of a healthy democracy
• Focus on media literacy and labour-centred skepticism

“They taught about the class societies and how media can change things around to benefit themselves or whoever it is that's powerful. I don't look at the paper in the same way that I used to” (PEL Interview as cited in Roth, 2007, p. 13). 
Protective Securities

• Demand the maintenance and increased distribution of protective securities within Canada (Spencer, 1994; Terry and Abdullat, 2004).
• Cultivate solidarity and empathy for the struggles of others, increasing a sense of communal responsibility (Friesen, 1994; Nussbaum, 2010b; Sears, 2003).
• Solidarity despite difference increases the conviction that providing a strong welfare state is morally right (Kuisma, 2007; Nussbaum, 2010).
• Friesen’s (1994) conviction that “through a more effective workers’ education movement [a] different ‘social order’ can [be mobilised], an alternative community, that builds community-based values” (p. 187)
CAW PEL: Canadian Union Renewal

- Contributes to the development of instrumental freedoms at an individual level while providing the possibility to increase such freedoms at a broader societal level.
- Viable avenue for revitalising the labour movement in Canada.
- Positive impact on the continual and dynamic process for development as freedom.
- Bridging the gap between the CP’s theory and sustained practice in the union, workplace, and community.
- Attitudinal Measure → Participant Observation
References


