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## **CLC announces new literacy project**

The CLC has launched a new literacy project, *Learning in Solidarity: Integrating a Vision of Union Literacy*. CLC Executive Vice-President Jean-Claude Parrot said that with this project, the CLC will continue to provide co-ordination and technical support over the next year to Congress affiliates and federations of labour involved in literacy. "When workers gain skills individually and collectively, the labour movement is strengthened immeasurably," said Parrot. "We are very pleased to be able to carry on our work in the area of literacy."

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the labour movement is strengthened immeasurably"

The new initiative will begin to integrate literacy needs and issues into the CLC's daily work, particularly in labour education. The project will provide support for the valuable work of the CLC Literacy Working Group. It will also publish three issues of the newsletter, *Learning Together: Solidarity at Work*, and continue the development of curriculum, tools, resources, courses and research to do with literacy and clear language. Tamara Levine, who has co-ordinated the CLC's literacy project since 1996, has been re-confirmed in her position.

The project receives funding from the National Literacy Secretariat and will run until May, 2001.

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## Unions key to workplace training, Georgetti says

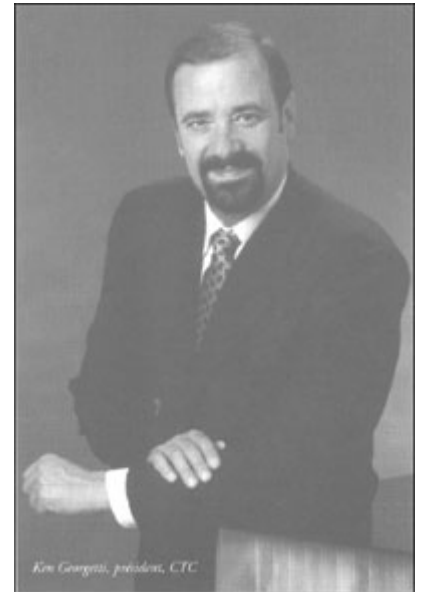
*On May 2, CIC President Ken Georgetti spoke at a Conference Board of Canada Symposium in Halifax, "Partners 2000: Linking Education and the Local Economy."* The previous evening, Cominco Ltd. Of Trail, B.C., where Ken worked for 11 years in the smelter and as a pipe fitter and was president of USWA Local 480 from 1981 to 1987, had won an award for Excellence in Workplace Education. Here are excerpts from his speech: "There has been a fair bit of water under the bridge since I was a high school kid in Trail, B.C. But I can remember as clearly as yesterday the fellows from Cominco who would come down to recruit the guys who were not making it in school to go work at the smelter. They promised good wages and a job for life.

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"That was 30 years ago. Some of my friends have lost their jobs. The plants have been modernized, and some of the workers did not have the skills for the jobs needing new technology. It is a typical story of my generation, one that has been repeated hundreds of times over through the resource and manufacturing sectors across this country. Workers were hired for their strong arms and backs, and not valued for their intelligence or their potential to learn.

"What has changed at Cominco is that now people have a chance to learn. They have an on-site learning centre that offers a wide range of educational opportunities. My old local union, the United Steelworkers of America Local 480, has been involved from the beginning. And I am proud to say that the union has been central in framing what kind of training there should be and how it should be provided ...

"From a labour point of view, unions have to be important players in workplace learning. We are elected to represent the interests of the workers and need to be active participants in decisions about workplace education ... decisions about the design, the content, the mode of delivery, how programs are evaluated. Workers will be wary of participating in a program that is run solely by management because of fear of reprisals or potential threats to their job security. Knowing the union is there advocating on their behalf assures workers that their interests are being represented.



## Clear language helps workers know their rights

"The most significant value of workplace learning is that it is a way to enhance the lives of workers. It provides greater job security and portability. It can bring confidence as well as skills. We know that not just any workplace training is good learning. It has to be learning that is centered on the needs of workers.

- Worker-centred learning empowers workers to have more control over their lives and their jobs.
- Worker-centred learning builds on what workers already know.
- Worker-centred learning addresses the needs of the whole person, and is not solely guided by the needs of the learner *as a worker*.
- Worker-centred learning is developmental.
- Worker-centred learning reflects the diverse learning styles and needs of adult workers.
- Worker-centred learning integrates literacy with other aspects of workplace education.
- Worker-centred programs are accessible.
- Worker-centred programs involve workers in planning and decision-making. "And finally,
- Worker-centred programs are voluntary and assure confidentiality.

"We in labour have our own work cut out for us. We need to hone our vision of workplace education so that our goals are clear and are shared. We have to work within our own ranks to convince labour leaders that this is an issue worth fighting for, especially at the bargaining table.

"The right to learn needs to be up there among our highest priorities. Our members are looking to us to play a key role in advocating for quality workplace learning. Ultimately, workers who are more skilled and active will help make the union a more democratic and representative organization.

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representative organization. "

"The labour movement is ready to talk to employers, to government and to educators about these issues. I know we don't have the same motivation for getting involved. I know we'll often have different ways of approaching how the learning happens. But hopefully, we will have enough in common for us to move forward in exciting ways. Ways that will be of mutual benefit and that ultimately will both enhance the lives of workers and vastly improve our workplaces.

"The workers of Canada deserve nothing less."

## Peer tutors, college instructors combine talents in B.C.

Innovation works in workplace education. That lesson was driven home when members of the CLC's Literacy Working Group spent three days in Vancouver in March, exploring the "hybrid" model some unions have developed for their workplace education programs.

The model combines the strengths of community college instructors and union peer tutors to suit the particular workplace education needs of the members. To implement this model, several unions have been working closely with adult basic education instructors at Capilano College in North Vancouver through their union, the College Institute Educators' Association (CIEA).

For example, peer tutors from the Hospital Employees' Union (HEU) are trained by the college and then work side by side with the college instructor in the classroom, usually with small groups of participants.

Peer tutors from the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union (CEP), and Pulp, Paper and Woodworkers Union of Canada (PPWC) are trained by college instructors through the LEAP program (Learning Experience Assisted by Peers). The peer tutors then run the classes in pairs, with ready access to ongoing training and regular support by phone and e-mail from the college.

The unions are proud of the models they have developed and of the kind of learning that takes place in their programs. They are also pleased to be working with the public education system through the college and to have the benefit of the experience of seasoned CIEA instructors.

"It's not so much the fine details of the model that are important, but rather how the spirit of empowering workers defines everything we do."



Top left to right: Jan Thorn (CEP), Ed Brown (Nfld. Fed, NUPGE).  
Bottom left to right: Karen Kennedy (Alta. Fed.), Steve Petersen (NT Fed.),  
Pat Williamson (Man. Fed.), Cathy Remus (CUPE), Linda Wentzel (NS Fed.),  
Tamara Levine (CLC), Catherine Jeffrey (HEU). (Missing: Ron Torgerson, SFL).

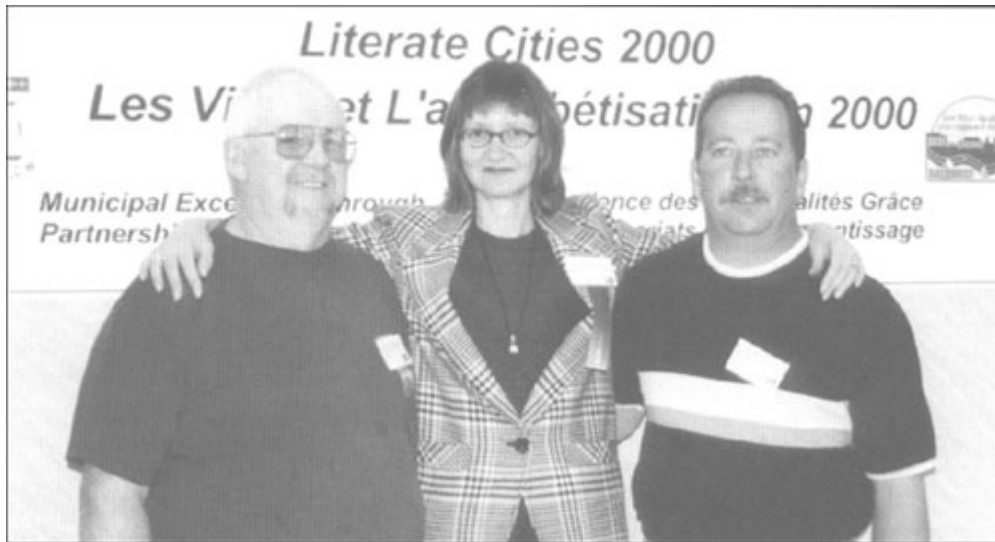
## **Making a difference**

At the same time, the unions are reaping the advantages that a co-worker tutor can bring to the classroom. Someone who is familiar with the participants and is part of the same workplace and union can make all the difference, particularly for workers who have had negative experiences at school in the past.

"It's not so much the fine details of the model that are important, but rather how the spirit of empowering workers defines everything we do," said Jim Dixon, CEP LEAP co-ordinator.

Members of the CLC's Literacy Working Group from eight provinces and territories went on the "exploring the model" mission. They met with representatives from the three unions and the instructors' association, sat in on an HEU class at Vancouver General Hospital, and attended a meeting of the B.C. Literacy Working Group. They also visited the UFCW 2000 Training Centre in New Westminster, and had a sumptuous meal served and prepared by students in the UFCW cooking program.

Everyone went away inspired, with many ideas and suggestions to bring back to their own organizations.



Terry Bennett (CUPE, Local 569), Dianne Martin (CUPE, Local 1289),  
Jim Murphy (CUPE, Local 569), City of St. John's Nfld.

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## Municipal workforce pilot project takes off

It was a good idea-developing a workplace education program in Bathurst, New Brunswick as a pilot project for the municipal workforce with the Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators (CAMA). But when the City first tried to implement it, it didn't go very far.

"We learned the hard way," said Tracy Branch, Director of Administrative Services at the City of Bathurst. "I started out trying to run it out of my office and it fell flat on its face. Then we got the unions and the other stakeholders involved and now things are going really well."

### Five municipalities involved

The program in Bathurst is one of five pilot projects in Canadian municipalities. The other cities involved are St. John's (Nfld), Moncton (N.B.), Edmonton (Alta), and Port Moody (B.C). The projects were highlighted at CAMA's *Literate Cities 2000* conference in May in Bathurst.

"I'd been out of school for 30 years, and it was great to have the chance to brush up on my skills," said Terry Bennett, an outside worker for 23 years, who participated in the program in St. John's. Bennett has been on the executive of CUPE Local 569 for the past 15 years, and is now the local's Vice-President.

"I think it also encourages the others to come forward when they see someone from the local union executive getting involved."

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More than 30 CUPE members and staff from across the country participated in the conference. CUPE is launching its own literacy initiative, *Union Building through Basic Skills Training*, with financial support from the National Literacy Secretariat.

## **Celebrate International Literacy Day on Sept. 8**

International Literacy Day has been celebrated around the world since 1967 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The day calls attention to one of UNESCO's primary concerns: that every child and adult have access to education enabling them to become full and literate participants in their communities.

In Canada, International Literacy Day is a grassroots event involving Canadians of all ages and backgrounds. At the community level, there are special activities to promote literacy and life-long learning, and to celebrate local literacy achievements. These events highlight literacy as a broadly based issue that touches almost every aspect of people's lives and as a key to both personal development and economic opportunity.

### **The gains we've made**

As International Literacy Day 2000 approaches, it's time to reflect on what we've learned about literacy training in the labour movement. We have a clearer vision of why unions need to become involved with this training. We know that workers and unions benefit when members have the chance to participate in their learning and are respected. We know that training works when it takes into account the learning needs of members as whole persons.

We have learned that the workplace is a good place for learning because it's convenient and accessible, but only when the union has a strong voice in the program's design, content and method. We know that bargaining literacy means bargaining for a worker's right to learn—a right that should not be taken away at the whim of government or employers.

Many unions and federations of labour have launched their own literacy initiatives:

- The Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union (CEP), the United Steelworkers of America (USWA) and the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) are exploring how their organizations can respond effectively to the literacy needs of their members.
- The United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) and the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE) have been running programs for several years.
- At the federation level, literacy initiatives are underway in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Québec, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland.

These affiliates and federations meet twice yearly through the CLC Literacy Working Group to share information and learn from each others' work. In addition, many local unions across Canada have excellent union-based literacy programs in place.

### **Join in!**

Join the International Literacy Day activities and celebrations in many communities across the country on and around September 8. Find out about what's going on in your area with unions and literacy. Raise the issue of literacy at your labour council. Let International Literacy Day, 2000 be about learning together—in solidarity.



## **Nova Scotia literacy session lays good foundation**

"The lights really went on for me this week-end," said one participant at the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour's first union-based literacy institute.

Members of workplace project teams and union literacy advocates spent two days in Sydney this June learning about ways workplace education programs can meet members' needs and build the union.



Fourteen union members from locals across the province and seven members of the federation's education committee participated in the session. They learned about union-based approaches to adult learning and literacy, and about critical literacy and bargaining. They left armed with individual action plans to integrate some of these approaches in their own workplace and union.

"This is an important first step for us," said Alex Macdonald, Secretary-Treasurer of the NSFL and chair of the Education Committee. The federation hopes to continue this work through regional training opportunities and, at some point, through the establishment of an Atlantic institute.

"We now have a core of solid trade unionists in Nova Scotia who are committed to literacy through workplace education," said Macdonald. "We have to keep building on that foundation."

## **Sharing strategies from across the continent in Windsor**

Canada played host for the first time to this year's two-day US / Canada Caucus on Workplace Learning in Windsor, Ontario. The fourth annual caucus brought together about 80 trade unionists from across North America in early May. There were newcomers to workplace learning, as well as those with many years of experience. Some were part of joint union-management programs and were looking for ways to strengthen the unions role. Others were involved in labour education through their union or labour council and wanted to find out more about how to bring education to their members in the workplace.



There were inspirational speeches, panel presentations on strengthening the union through workplace learning, workshops, a chance to let loose and dance on Saturday night, and excellent networking. Everything contributed to the enthusiasm participants took home with them.

"Sharing strategies with union brothers and sisters in Windsor gave me new ideas for our worker education programs, and strengthened our cross-border solidarity and friendship," said Fran Fortino, a representative from the Massachusetts Worker Education Roundtable and SEIU Local 509.

Plans are underway to create a listserv for labour workplace education activists to continue to share information and learn from each other electronically.



*Mary Beth Levan, with the Western Arctic's NDP association, and Bill Schram, with Canadian Auto Workers Local 2304, hold a banner to mark May Day during a march from Yellowknife's City Hall to the post office.*

## The CLC Literacy Working Group

The CLC Literacy Working Group is composed of affiliates and federation representatives with an interest in union-based literacy and clear language, The Working Group meets twice yearly to share information and resources, learn from our collective experiences and advise the CLC on its Workplace Literacy Project Contact your Literacy Working Group representative for more information about what's going on in your organization.

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