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Literacy and clear language go together

This issue of *Learning Together* takes a look at some positive developments in the area of clear language, and how they're helping to further the aims of union-based literacy.

Clear language is about learning how to communicate so that the messages we send are understood well by our readers - our members. It is not only about what we have to say, but also about how it will be received.

Clear language involves thinking about who our audience is and consciously writing for that audience. It often includes unlearning old habits, because many of us have strong attachments to writing in our familiar inaccessible ways.

Clear language is about learning how to communicate so that the messages we send are understood well by our readers - our members.

Clear language supports our overall literacy efforts. Clear language and literacy work hand-in-hand to provide an equal opportunity for workers from diverse backgrounds to participate in union activities and be heard. Literacy can help us reach out beyond our "activists" to members who may not yet feel connected to the union, and provide us with ways to look critically at how we carry out our work. This includes how we run our meetings, conventions, and courses, communicate orally and in print, and strive to make the union more inclusive.

One new development in clear language is a CLC resource, a *Clear Language and Design* screen, to help check documents for clarity (see page 5). It is the latest product of the *Learning in Solidarity* series of the CLC's Workplace Literacy Project, and a companion to the binder, *Making It Clear: Clear Language for Union Communication*. Along with a new course on clear language that was piloted at the CLC Ontario Winter School in February, 2001, it is part of an effort to develop skills and raise awareness about the benefits of communicating more clearly and effectively with our members.

We hope you will find the stories about clear language interesting and inspiring. We'd love to hear your stories too.

Learning Together is published three times a year with financial support from the National Literacy Secretariat. We welcome your articles, event notices and opinion pieces.



Hitting the targets

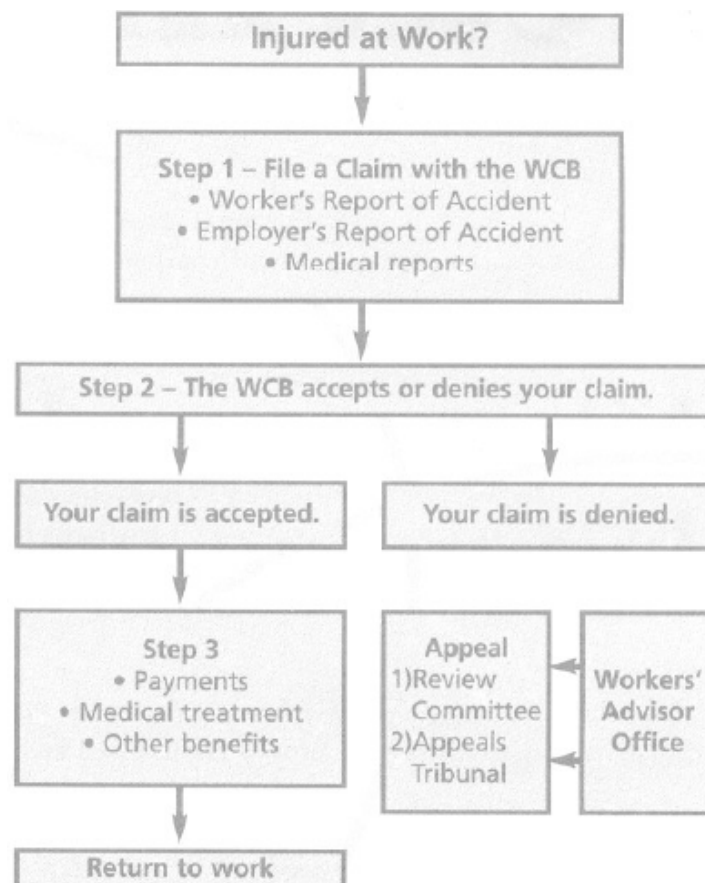
A new dear language translation of the *Workers' Handbook* and other materials from the Workers' Compensation Board (WCB) of the Northwest Territories and Nunavut are now available. Thanks to a collaboration by the Northern Territories Federation of Labour and the NWT Literacy Council, the material is now written at a Grade 5-6 readability level. This represents the average literacy level of the target audience of workers. The material had previously been written at a Grade 12 level.

Graphics and white space were added to the handbook for easier reading. The structure was set up in a question-and-answer format, with questions in bold, 14-point font, and the answers below in 12-point font. This resulted in a wider booklet with more pages and includes a flow chart of the WCB process that is dear and easy to follow.

Brochures directed at the harvesters, hunters, trappers, and fishers who require information to access claims are now in the process of being completed. The dear language translation will make the further translation to aboriginal languages much easier.

For more information and the text of the dear language documents, please visit: www.wcb.nt.ca

Steve Petersen, Northern Territories Federation of Labour



Quebec's 1 per cent solution brings results

Quebec's requirement that employers invest at least 1% of payroll in workforce training has brought results that have exceeded labour's expectations.

The requirement, which applies to all employers with a payroll of \$250,000 or more per year, covers virtually all businesses with more than 10 employees. It was made law in June, 1995.

Data from 1998 (the first available) show that all categories of workers have benefitted from the investment in training. For example, two out of five production workers received an average of 48 hours of training per year, while two out of five office workers received an average of 42 hours. The data also showed that for workers with higher levels of education, a larger number of employees (50%) received less training (an average of about 33 hours).

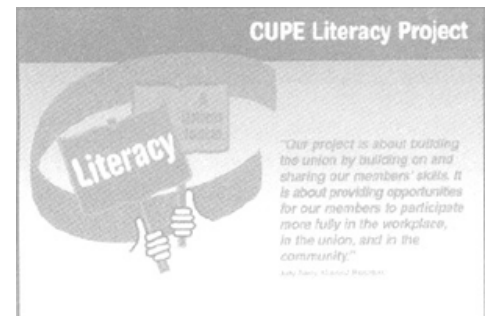
While the law is starting to bear fruit, the Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec (FTQ) remains vigilant about the need for equity. The FTQ originally lobbied for a provision that would ensure funds were spent equitably within the workplace. The labour central wanted training to be provided to workers outside the usual management, professional and technical ranks. While the government did not comply with this demand, the law does require businesses to report the kind of training provided and to which categories of employees. The FTQ will continue to monitor the results.

In addition to the findings from the employer questionnaires, a large-scale evaluation is currently underway. The results should be available over the next several months. For more information about the 1% law and the evaluation results, contact the web site of the ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité Sociale, in the section Emploi-Québec, Service to employers at: www.mess.gouv.qc.ca.

Louise Miller, Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec

CUPE' s first literacy conference: workers need support

Workplace literacy programs are key to providing support for workers who face an increasingly complex world and a changing economy. But workers who need greater literacy skills for everyday tasks, and to upgrade and learn new skills, aren't being helped enough.



Canadian Union of Public Employees President Judy Darcy to literacy conference that "the expectation of workers to keep up with that change is enormous. Workers are willing to learn, but they are not getting the support and resources they need."

A key goal of CUPE's national conference Literacy: A Union Issue, held January 19th to 21st in Hull, Québec, was to provide participants with an understanding of why literacy is a union issue and what literacy means from a labour perspective. The conference also recognized the work that CUPE locals and others in the labour movement have done to advance the issue of literacy and to share their collective expertise.

The conference provided a forum to exchange personal stories about literacy, and the impact literacy programs are having on CUPE members and their families. These stories highlighted why now, more than ever, literacy is a union issue.

Workers spoke about how they were able to help their kids with their homework for the first time, and about learning to understand their collective agreements and stand up for their rights.

CUPE members told about the self-confidence they've gained, about how they were finally able to apply for training and jobs that were closed to them before, even when they had 20 years of service. They spoke about how they were able to help their kids with their homework for the first time, and about learning to understand their collective agreements and stand up for their rights.

The conference was part of a CUPE initiative funded by the National Literacy Secretariat. It offered workshops on program models, financing, and clear language and culminated in a strategy session to identify priorities for CUPE's literacy work.

Sylvia Sioufi, CUPE

PSAC makes literacy inroads in public service

How does a union take steps to bring union-based literacy to the workplace? A three-day Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) forum in March, Literacy in the Federal Public Service: A Foundation for Learning, provided lots of ideas.

"We must hold on to the dream."

The first day was a union day, followed by a joint forum planned by representatives from the PSAC, the Canadian Labour Congress, the National Literacy Secretariat and the Treasury Board Secretariat.

About 60 workers from across Canada and from many federal departments participated. The contributions of current and former coordinators, instructors and participants in federal workplace education programs set the tone for the three days, which combined short presentations with action-oriented workshops. Veteran union educator D'Arcy Martin facilitated the session, helping participants move seamlessly from learning to planning for action.



Facilitators at the PSAC Union Forum: From left to right (back) Terri Lee Rayvales-Mele, John Baglow, Arlene Preston, Robert Ozoux, Bonnie Robichaud, Ursule Critoph, Tony White (front) D'Arcy Martin, LeoO'Rourke, Howie Wést, Tamara Levine

The forum encouraged the creation of networks of union and management literacy advocates, and prepared union activists to promote the principles of union-based literacy at their workplaces.

PSAC participants left the forum excited about the future of literacy within their union. "Now is the time for action ... we must hold on to the dream," said John Baglow, PSAC Executive Vice-President.

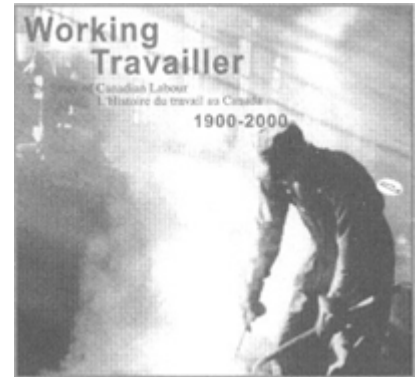
Howie West, PSAC

Tools for learning

Now available: the CLC Workers Millennium Project! This high quality set of resources includes a book of photographs, a video series and a CD-ROM about the struggles of workers and the history of labour in Canada. The video series is a set of four half-hour VHS cassettes in English or French. The interactive, bilingual CD-ROM is at once an encyclopedia, a history book, and a collection of photos, shorts films and songs. Cost: \$69.95 for each component, or \$99.95 for the set. Order from Marlin Motion Pictures Ltd, 211 Watline Ave., Mississauga, ON L4Z 1P3. Phone:

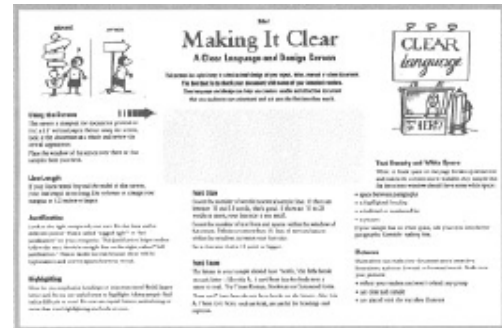
(905) 890-1500; fax: (905) 890-6550. Orders can be faxed within Canada toll-free to: 1-800-203-8786, or e-mail your order to info@marlineducation.com. You can order the book

Working/Travailler: Images of Canadian Labour for \$19.95 by calling 1-800-387-0141 (Ontario and Québec), or 1-800-387-0172 (elsewhere in Canada).



Tools for learning (continued)

The Clear Language and Design Screen is a handy tool for all members of your organization to help self-check documents for clarity and accessibility. Laminated in an 11-by-17 inch format, the screen is available in English or French. Cost: \$3 each or \$2.50 for bulk orders of five or more, including GST. To order contact: dditeracy@dc-ctc.ca.



Seeds for Change: A Curriculum Guide for Worker-centred Union Literacy is a "how to" guide for instructors on how to integrate literacy into a problem posing curriculum to encourage critical reflection and action in and beyond the workplace. A new resource from the CLC's Learning in Solidarity series. In English and French. Coming summer 2001.

Our Times literacy issue. As part of the 20th anniversary celebration of *Our Times*, Canada's independent labour magazine, a special theme issue will be published on workers, unions and literacy. Due our for International Literacy Day, September 8, this special issue will be dedicated to answering the question: Why is literacy a union issue? To order, call (416) 531-6877. Toll-free: 1-800-648-6131. Fax: (416) 531-1641 E-mail: ourtimes@web.ca. Bulk rates available.

Mark your calendar

Conferences

Second International Conference on Researching Work and Learning, University of Calgary, July 26-28, 2001.

Conference themes include work, technology, partnerships, gender and diversity, ideology, learning, action research and epistemology. Roundtables on Union-based Literacy and Innovative Practices in Labour Movement Education will be featured. For more information, consult the conference Web site at www.ucalgary.ca/cted/confer2001/. or contact Margaret-Anne Stroh at (403) 220-6229, or masttroh@ucalgary.ca.

Recognizing Learning Conference, Westin Hotel, Halifax October 28-31, 2001

The first joint national conference on prior learning assessment (PLAR) and qualification recognition (QR) is an opportunity for business, labour, education, and community and government organizations to reflect on and benefit from the existing knowledge and skills of all Canadians and immigrants to Canada. The focus will be on how pre-existing knowledge and skills can be articulated and used by individuals, workplaces, educational institutions and occupational bodies for our future economic and social prosperity. For more information, contact www.placentre.ns.ca.

Workplace Learning Conference,
Sheraton Chicago Hotel and Towers Cityfront, December 2 - 4, 2001

This is a unique opportunity to learn about successful partnership models and to network with business, union, education, and government practitioners and policy makers. Join colleagues from Australia, Canada, Mexico, the United Kingdom and the United States who participate in the more than 100 conference workshops, sessions, roundtables, and tours. For more information, contact www.workplace-learning.net.

Resolving to be clear



It's probably an understatement that the labour movement in Canada creates a lot of print. We send out newsletters, magazines and campaign material. We post notices of meetings and events. We write courses and draft collective agreements. We have constitutions and bylaws.

But as Barb Byers, Saskatchewan Federation of Labour President (SFL), asks: "How often do we take the time to stop and think about who we're writing for, and whether our members are reading -let alone understanding and acting upon - what we write?" The truth is that a lot of our members have difficulty understanding our printed material.

What happens when our members are faced with written material that is too complex? Sometimes, the information doesn't sink in, or the reader gets frustrated and gives up. Unfortunately, this happens a lot more often than we realize. This isn't an issue only for our members whose first language isn't English or French or for those without much formal education. It is also an issue for many of us who, from time to time, have difficulty with complicated written material. Or for those of us who are just drowning in paper.

A step to clarity

The SFL executive has decided to take a first step towards making its processes a little clearer and more accessible. Effective immediately, resolutions to the SFL convention, taking place in Saskatoon from November 7-9, can be written in one of two ways. They can be written using the traditional "Whereas" and "Therefore be it resolved." Or they can be written using the new clear language format.

Here is an example using a resolution from the 2000 Convention. It has been written in both the traditional way, and in clear language.

Traditional

WHEREAS The SFL submits labour representatives to Boards, Commissions and Committees of Review; and

WHEREAS Past practice has been for all names submitted to the Executive Council to be forwarded to the Government of Saskatchewan for consideration.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED That the SFL Executive Council implement a process whereby the Standing Committees of the Federation of Labour where practical and applicable

review all resumes and applications received for appointments to Boards, Commissions and outside agencies.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the recommendations of the Standing Committees on names to be submitted be given serious consideration by the Executive Council.

Clear language "translation"

The SFL will:

1. Whenever it makes sense to do this, have an SFL committee go through all the applications and resumés we get, before we make recommendations to the government on who we want for our labour representatives on government Boards, Commissions and Committees of Review.
2. Seriously think about the recommendations from the committee about who should be appointed.

We want this because:

3. The SFL tells the government who we want as our representatives on their Boards, Commissions and Committees of Review.
4. Up to now, we have just given the government the name of every person who wants to be one of our representatives.

*"How often do we take the time
to stop and think about who
we're writing for, and whether
our members are reading
let alone understanding and
acting upon - what we write?"*

Besides being written in accessible language, the action part of the resolution is presented first because it is the most important part. When debating the resolution at convention, you don't have to say you are talking about the second "Whereas." Instead, say, "Point 4." The other rules for resolutions (number of words, etc.) stay the same as before.

So, if you feel more comfortable writing in 19th century English, feel free to go the traditional route. But if you'd rather use the new clear language format, you now have that option.

For help translating your resolution into clear language, or if you want more information about the SFL initiative, please contact Ron Torgerson, Workers Education for Skills Training (WEST) Co-ordinatar at the SFL office:

Phone: (306) 924.8574; Fax:(306) 525.8960 sfl.west@sk.sympatico.ca

Ron Torgerson, SFL

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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