



Manitoba Federation of Labour

Presentation to the

Apprenticeship Futures Commission

November 8, 2007

Winnipeg Manitoba

Introduction

The Manitoba Federation of Labour (MFL) is our provinces largest central labour body, representing the interests of more than 35 national and international trade unions which are affiliated with the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC). Our affiliated unions, in turn, represent more than 95 thousand working men and women in the public and private sectors; in the construction sector, in the manufacturing, service, resources, tourism, information and transportation sectors. Our mandate is to develop consensus among our affiliates and speak on their behalf on many areas of mutual interest, including apprenticeship and training.

Both the Manitoba Federation of Labour and the Canadian Labour Congress have developed detailed policies on Apprenticeship and Training and are attached to this presentation for your information.

This presentation will respond to your list of areas of interest in the context of those policy papers.

1) The Manitoba Labour Market

The “labour market” is a descriptor developed by government and economic analysts to describe the “snap shot” condition of the workforce broken down into areas that include employment levels, labour force participation and unemployment data. This information is usually broken down into demographic categories such as gender, age, education attainment, equity groups and so on. Depending on the level of detail being reported in the “labour market report”, data can also be reported to give an overview of full-time/part-time employment, and by economic sector.

We rely on informal feed-back from our affiliates, the news media and government labour market data to form a perception of either a labour shortage or surplus in our province. Currently, shortages have been identified in a number of sectors, including the heavy, commercial and home construction/renovation industries and trades such as auto-mechanics. Given the outlook for heavy construction projects such as hydro-electric generation facilities, the Winnipeg

Floodway Expansion, the new Winnipeg Airport, road and bridge infrastructure repair and replacement and the volatile housing market, we anticipate the demand for apprentices and journeyed ticket holders to continue at least at its current levels, if not greater. This pressure will be exacerbated by the demand for Manitoba skilled workers in other western provinces as the economic boom continues to unfold.

Insofar as the impact on the Manitoba economy is concerned, demands on the labour force inevitably impact on project costs in the areas of wages and benefits as retention and recruitment efforts compete with the demand for the same workforce elsewhere in the country. Fair wages and benefits are essential aspects of paid employment. However, they become more difficult to predict and plan for when the Western Canadian economy lacks order and planning and the cut and thrust of competition for journeyed workers has an impact on them. This underscores the need for a sensible and realistic industrial strategy, not only at the Manitoba level, but elsewhere in Canada as well.

2) **Understanding, Awareness and Perception of Apprenticeship**

Perception of the skilled trades as a viable and attractive career path by students and their families is one of the largest challenges that face the promoters of this option. For the past six decades, families and educators have told young people that true success in life relies on a university education and a lucrative career as a lawyer, or doctor or other profession that a degree opens the door for. Too often, the skilled trades have been characterized as poor second choices reserved for those who don't have the academic skills or financial resources to enter and complete a degree program.

To turn this around, we need to educate the hands that rock the cradle – parents, and the hands that shape student attitudes and perceptions – educators. All the advertising and skilled trades promotion in the world can't compete with mom, dad and the favourite idolized teacher. We need to convince them that skilled

trades are a vehicle for people to make a valuable contribution to society and will provide financial security and a high quality of life for young people.

Part and parcel with this is the need for a public education and promotion message that drives the same point home to society at large.

The single greatest bottleneck in the apprenticeship system is the difficulty convincing employers to hire apprentices and undertake good-faith participation in the apprenticeship training system. Most often, they want to hire journeyed ticket holders, but they want to avoid the real or imagined issues involved in the apprenticeship process. It is key that employers be convinced or required to participate in the apprenticeship training system if it is ever to be functional and relevant.

3) **Structure, Framework and System**

The Apprenticeship and Trades Qualifications Board and the attendant Provincial Trade Advisory Committees are the key to establishing and maintaining relevant Apprenticeship and Training programmes in Manitoba. These bodies, collectively, are –or should be - the architects of apprenticeship training and, through regular reviews, the bodies that ensure apprenticeship training evolves in an orderly manner to meet the needs of workers and an economic development strategy. The MFL believes that the role and make-up of these bodies must be reviewed on a regular basis to make sure they remain relevant and up to the task at hand.

The Apprenticeship and Trades Qualifications Board and the Provincial Trade Advisory Committees should be made up primarily of journeyed ticket holders from the skilled Trades, with representation from the ranks of apprentices. These representatives should be appointed by their democratically structured organizations. Employer representatives, in minority numbers, should be named by their organizations. Employer input is invaluable when it comes to monitoring future

apprenticeship needs that come about through economic development, but the Board and PTAC's should be dominated by worker representatives to keep the system focused on the needs and welfare of working people – the apprentices and journeyed ticket holders.

The policies and processes determined by the Board and PTACs are the basis for everything related to apprenticeship training and the stakeholders. That is why it is essential that they be well thought out and even handed because those policies will in large part determine the success or failure of our system and our ability to ensure a healthy and vibrant skilled trades workforce exists.

Because of these realities, it is important that the Apprenticeship and Training Board and Branch be recognized as key stakeholders when other government departments collaborate in the development of an industrial or larger economic strategy. It is essential that workforce needs are part of the outset of the planning process to avoid, as much as possible, future skilled labour shortages.

In our view, the numbers and types of designated trades need to be increased to reflect today's realities. Workplace processes and areas of specialization are in a continuous state of evolution, more so now than at any time in the past. As many of these new work processes as possible should be designated as apprenticeable trades to ensure that workers skills evolve and develop in lock-step with need. This results in consistent workforce quality and ability and consumer protection. Workers have a right to adequate training to secure their positions in the workforce and consumers need to be confident that work is being performed by qualified and well trained workers. For example, computers are an everyday, expensive presence in the lives of many people. Computer technicians should be able to expertly maintain and build computers. But the quality of work done by different companies can widely vary since the quality of training widely varies in an uncontrolled manner.

When it comes to generalization versus specialization of training and certification, the MFL strongly urges that none of the trades qualifications regimes be watered down. Journeyed workers should have a qualification certificate that shows employers and consumers alike that these certified workers are able to meet high standards in all facets of their trade. Partial certifications are only another way to describe the de-skilling of the workforce. It harms the workers involved and serves only to decrease employer training, wage and benefit costs. It limits the ability of workers to be employed by other employers or to find work in other jurisdictions.

Watering down the value of a trade certification is guaranteed to make apprenticeship training less attractive to young people and workers in general. It will only exacerbate recruitment issues that have already been identified by all the major stakeholders.

Currently, entry into the trades through apprenticeship training can be difficult for under-represented equity groups – those workers who can be identified by established demographic measures. We believe that measures must be taken to ensure that all equity groups are represented in apprenticeship training in the warranted numbers. It may well be that affirmative action style measures must be taken to make sure this occurs. This reflects a basic human fairness and equity principle that must be introduced sooner, rather than later. Workers must not be excluded from the apprenticeship training system because of their gender, race, religion, disabilities or any of the other grounds that offend the Human Rights Code.

In our view, the way to maximize skilled worker mobility from region to region or from province to province is to promote as much as possible the Red Seal designation. The Red Seal tells everyone that the holder met exacting qualification standards of jurisdictions that have adopted it. Partial qualifications do exactly the opposite – they tell everyone that the certificate holder can carry

out some of the tasks normally associated with a journey worker – skills that may or may not meet the prospective employers needs without further training.

Compulsory certification has been a practice normally associated with public safety issues. It may well be the key to growth in the numbers of apprentices that will meet labour market needs in the future. It is our view that the number of trades covered by compulsory certification should be expanded as rapidly as possible to ensure that a sufficient number of apprentices are in the system to meet the need and to attract young people. Currently, there is a substantial backlog of young people and workers already in the workforce waiting to begin their training – hardly something that will improve recruitment among graduating high school students. Even pre-employment programs have a waiting list of a year or two. In some trades, prospective apprentices can face a wait of three or four years before being admitted to training. Compulsory Certification and an appropriate ratio between journeyed workers and apprentices in the workplace will accelerate the flow of new apprentices.

Because of the shortage of skilled workers, real or perceived, there is a temptation to reduce the time and standards required to complete apprenticeship levels. Our apprenticeship and training practitioners are unanimous in recommending against any reductions. The current mix of workplace and classroom training for apprentices works well – classroom training delivers the theory and workplace experience makes it stick. This is the process that results in highly skilled journeyed ticket holders and should not be short-circuited on the altar of short-term expediency. In fact, some practitioners report to us that recent evolutions in some trades may need more time and training to maintain adequate training standards.

Block releases for classroom training is a barrier for some employers to participating in the apprenticeship training system. Some argue that regular one day absences for classroom training is easier to accommodate than a multi-week

block release. But this is an observation based solely on anecdotal reports and has not been analyzed to see if it is a practical option.

4) **Training and Skill Development**

The MFL commends the provincial government for recognizing the need for more apprenticeship opportunities and moving to increase the number of apprenticeship spaces by 4,000 over the next five years.

The Manitoba Federation of Labour and the Canadian Labour Congress are committed to the use of the public post-secondary education system, through Community Colleges and other public institutions, for the primary delivery of apprenticeship training and future up-grade or gaps training programs. We believe this is the most long term cost-effective way to deliver high quality training that is unencumbered by other, non-training agendas.

We believe that worker skill portability issues are best met through the promotion or even requirement that Red Seal standards are met before graduation. This, of course assumes that the basic curriculum has been developed by a system that requires input from journeyed ticket holders and apprentices, education specialists and industry representatives.

We need to find a way to greatly increase the number of apprentices hired by employers. This has been identified by the labour movement training practitioners as the single greatest bottle-neck for the system.

Financing the apprenticeship training system across Canada took a severe hit in the early 1990's when the Federal government devolved responsibility and financing for the training system to the provinces. We need to convince the Federal Government to acknowledge and fulfill its responsibility to fostering and financing a vibrant training system perhaps through a reinvigorated Employment Insurance system. This includes financial support for the trainers and the

apprentices, particularly when the apprentice is involved in classroom training. Many apprentices also support families, so their financial support needs are generally higher than is currently recognized by the HRSDC through its Employment Insurance Program.

The labour movement has a long history of promoting and fostering essential skills training for all workers, and will continue to do so. Literacy and numeracy skill training greatly facilitates the success of apprenticeship training, particularly in areas such as workplace safety and health training.

Conclusion

We have tried to quickly address many of the issues raised in the Commissions discussion paper. We believe that gaps in this presentation that have been brought about by the time limitations will be addressed in the MFL and CLC apprenticeship policy papers that are attached.

Thank you.

JD/ph.cope342