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Worker-Centred Training in an Economy-Centred World: The Challenge for Labour

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Introduction

The contemporary training regime – government reports and publications on training, specific training programs and generalized policy discussions on the matter by politicians and other leading elites – is a historical curiosity. It comes along at a time when working people would appear to require less and less in the way of workplace skills. Over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries most jobs were relentlessly dumbed down. Workplaces were subjected to wave after wave of technological innovation and organizational rationalization. In the process, the notion of an engaged, thoughtful labourer whose head and hands worked together gave way to an automatic, machine-guided employee whose most difficult challenge concerned their ability to habituate themselves to mind-numbing, repetitive tasks. And yet politicians, business advocates, academics and labour leaders regularly stress the importance of training and education in the globalizing economy. On the surface, public demands for training and education sit awkwardly against the evolving nature of the workplace. As the skills required for capitalist work have withered through time, there has been a paradoxical blossoming of public discussions about education and training. As capitalist society has come to require less and less *of* the worker, its social conventions have strangely come to demand more and more *from* the worker. As jobs have become increasingly mindless, the worker, curiously, is instructed to be increasingly mindful. We might summarize this by saying that capitalism pretentiously hires from the shoulders up, although most of its tasks have become a shoulders-down sort of affair. The training regime needs explanation.

To unpack this curiosity, we should begin by stressing that the protection and development of skills and knowledge have always been critical concerns for working people. Workers struggled against the Taylorising of the workplace and engaged in all sorts of resistant practices when faced with managerial encroachments. Beyond shop-floor struggles, working people have produced and circulated their own educational materials, taught about working class history, supported universal literacy, developed comprehensive apprenticeship programs, encouraged access to reference materials, established libraries, formed study groups, attended public lectures and meetings, circulated information about labour issues and supported accessible, comprehensive, publicly funded education. And political education about working class struggles in capitalist society, as we find in Donald Cameron's *The Education of Everett Richardson*, a story about a group of striking fishers who become more aware of corporate power, media complicity and union corporatism, has always been understood to be an important part of working men's or working women's education.¹

Does the contemporary training regime, however, respond to the training and educational issues that working people have always associated with their empowerment and well-being? It certainly cannot be assumed that the training regime contributes to the well-being of working people, especially when we take note of the fact that it emerged outside

of the labour movement. Moreover, in light of the paradox around the contemporary stress on training and skills in an era where jobs have generally been de-skilled, it would be facile to assume that the training regime corresponds to skill requirements that have objective residency in the evolving nature of jobs.

Indeed, there are two kinds of education and training. The first emerges organically and creatively out of the experiences of working people, and responds to their struggle for dignity and security in capitalist society. It empowers them as workers, provides them with a sense of purpose and task, orients them towards a better future and generally contributes to their well-being. *Organic training*, as it might be called, is as likely to unfold in the context of active, ongoing labouring activity and typically centres around the acquisition of knowledge and skills that are interior to the labour process.

Organic worker education and training can be contrasted with mere *job preparation*. This latter type of training is geared to the establishment of workplace routines, routines that are contoured by the accumulation strategies of distant corporate and political decision-makers. It focuses on equipping workers with the attitudes and knowledge required to settle into routinized work as quickly as possible. This latter type of training might more appropriately be understood as *training for the economy* rather than *training for the worker*. Indeed, it probably should not be called training at all since it is only about preparing people to be *good workers* in the globalizing economy. A distinction between authentic education and training on the one hand and mere employee preparedness on the other is certainly in order. Training *for work* is very different from training *for the worker*.

This straightforward distinction provides a clue to the contemporary training regime. To come to terms with the training regime we must ground our analysis in the evolving nature of work itself, and remain open to the possibility that the contemporary training regime is not in the authentic interests of workers. If it is true that work has lost most of its intoxicating Dionysian characteristics and that its reflective Apollinian elements have been consigned to fewer and fewer people, then this is where the examination of the training regime should begin. If historical struggles, especially on the shop-floor, have led to jobs characterized by sheer drudgery, then analysts should fold such truths into their assessment of the training and education of working people. To put the matter more in keeping with the analytical standpoint of this paper, to analyze the training regime properly we cannot fetishistically disregard the oppressive relations and struggles that inhere in capitalist work – we must understand work in terms of its historicized constitution and as a site of often intense political struggles.

In the first half of this paper we argue that the training regime, in its current guise, is rooted in the ideological need to create a *new worker* suitable to the global economy. It is not, therefore, simply about the calibration of skill sets with continually evolving jobs. In point of fact, it is not really about skills at all. Rather, we contend that the training regime is one of the primary sites where the ideological conception of the *new worker* is organized. As we will elaborate, the training regime largely teaches workers to be

A team players, to adopt the right attitude for work, to think of themselves as individuals in competition with others for jobs rather than as a collectivity of working people, to provide them with exaggerated credentials that makes them trustworthy to a potential employer, to get them off social assistance or to help them transfer a worker from one unchallenging job to another without their anger turning on the system. The training regime most clearly reflects and enters into the ongoing struggles between capital and labour that are so much a part – albeit an oft-forgotten one – of our globalizing world.

Consequently, the training regime, with its emphasis on job preparation for the new economy, is very different from training and education that contributes to the well-being of the worker. In the second half of this paper we show that organized labour recognizes this rudimentary tension. This tension between training for *work*, as we put it above, and training for *the worker* informs labour's response to the training push. It is clear that organized labour senses that training for the well-being of working people is very different from training to serve a corporate-led globalizing world. It senses, for example, the hypocrisy of training for jobs that often do not exist, or training that suits artificially inflated job qualifications of employers. Labour leaders often regard the training regime with healthy political suspicion and recognize that there is a capitalist-driven political project linked to globalization that drives it.

However, labour's political suspicions about the training regime are not sustained. Their wariness runs alongside the notion that training is somehow about the calibration of skill sets with the new economy. A sense that training should be in the real, long-term interests of workers co-exists with the sense that a plethora of new skills are needed for an ever-changing global economy. Labour tends to accept the calibration thesis despite the Tayloristic nature of most jobs and their political skepticism. On the whole, it appears to be colonized by the hegemonic notion that individual workers need to equip themselves with a battery of new skills in the global economy.

This inability to sort through authentic, worker-led training and education and elaborate ideological constructions faithful to our globalizing world is politically costly. First, it seems to associate worker empowerment with the acquisition of skills, despite the fact that labour's greatest political advances during the twentieth century came at a time when skills were being continually eroded. Secondly, it acquiesces to the notion that workers can merely respond to the insuperable demands of the new economy rather than struggling to set the terms of employment and jobs into the future – maybe even to the point of reversing capital's globalist agenda. Thirdly, it unwittingly participates in the re-invention of the highly political aspects of globalization as technical questions relating to job requirements. As workers in the north have been buffeted around by corporate layoffs, chronic unemployment and under-employment, sectoral collapses, falling real wages, the contraction of government services and roll-backs in labour laws there is a serious risk in re-inventing this assault in the language of deficient skill sets.

Of even greater concern is the fact that part of labour's noble efforts to restore an authentic, worker-centered dimension to the training agenda – steal away the agenda of training, as it were – revolves around the vague notion of democratic participation. Labour sometimes proceeds with the assumption that good training for working people is about teaching them to be good citizens. Again, therefore, rich political questions about class struggles in the era of globalization are being sublimated with sterile questions about civic responsibilities. Although this formulation plays well in an era where the capitalist assault is being problematically re-cast as an *erosion of democracy*, it is not at all clear to us that this enfeebled reclamation is part of the real interests of working people, especially if the basic message is that labour militancy is not appropriate in democracies, a pernicious idea given the extent of the class assault under way in Canada. Globalization and its injurious, anti-worker agenda is effectively de-politicized through the language of democratic participation and the obligations of citizenship.

The New Worker and the Training Regime

Of course, the skill/training paradox outlined in our introduction has been overstated. The global economy is replete with core jobs, jobs where the demand for extensive training and education follows from the complex nature of the work.² These core jobs will include high-end *professional* work such as the varieties of engineering and scientific work, hardware and software development, legal training, architectural and medical work.³ It can also include work in the building trades that require years of apprenticeship, experience and education. A worker can spend innumerable years in school to acquire the knowledge and competency for the core jobs. These jobs will also feature considerable learning-as-one-goes and unending reflection of the best way to accomplish tasks. In most of the core jobs many years of education and cumulative experience are indispensable aspects of the work experience.

Most jobs in the global economy, however, are peripheral in nature. In these jobs we see the unfolding of a Taylorist logic with respect to the labour process. These *peripheral* jobs have come to require fewer skills and place very little in the way of demands upon the worker. These jobs are challenging only during an initial period of familiarization and habituation. In his reflective autobiography *Ten Thousand Working Days*, Robert Schrank speaks directly to the tedium and repetition associated with most capitalist work: "One of the machinists, Karl, showed me how to rebuild every part of each valve, one at a time. At the beginning, completing each valve proved to be a real challenge because of their great variety, and I worked hard to learn all I could about them. But once I had mastered the techniques of rebuilding valves, the work became tedious and I found my objectives began to shift from learning to do the task to thinking about how to get it done more simply and quickly. My work became known around the place as 'the valve project' and I found myself thinking a lot about how I could get rid of it." Although he was already working in an extensively rationalized workplace, Schrank was driven to rationalize his production of valves further to escape its drudgery and tedium: "Why

make the work easier? Because it meant considerably less concentration on something I now had mastered."⁴

So many jobs in the globalizing economy require considerably less engagement than Shrank's. The tedium of work is punctuated, at best, by ephemeral periods of problem-solving. The unsatisfying and undemanding nature of capitalist work has received extensive attention in the past. Indeed, early discussions on the evolution of capitalist work and its effects on the worker provided the grist for the critique of alienated labour. In stark contrast to Hegel, who had identified alienation as necessary for the rise of civil society, Marx contended that alienation, and particularly estranged labour, was the signature of a society in decay. In speaking of the rise of manufacturing capital Marx wrote: "While simple co-operation leaves the mode of the individual's labour for the most part unchanged, manufacture thoroughly revolutionizes it, and seizes labour power by its roots. It converts the worker into a crippled monstrosity by further particular skill as in a forcing – house, through the suppression of a whole world of productive drives and inclinations, just as in the states of La Plata they butcher a whole beast for the sake of his hide or his tallow."⁵ The rise of industrial capitalism hastened this degradation of labour: "Owing to the extensive use of machinery and to division of labour, the work of the proletarians has lost all individual character, and consequently, all charm for the workman... Modern industry has converted the little workshop of the patriarchal master into the great factory of the industrial capitalist. Masses of labourers, crowded into the factory, are organized like soldiers. As privates of the industrial army they are placed under the command of a perfect hierarchy of officer and sergeants."⁶ Long before the formalization of scientific management Marx cautioned against confusing the spectacular achievements of the capitalist labour process with the flowering of the capitalist worker. The bedazzling capitalist labour process necessarily coincides with the wilting of the capitalist worker: "... the better formed his product, the more deformed becomes the worker; the more civilized his object, the more barbarous becomes the worker; ... the more ingenious labour becomes, the less ingenious becomes the worker."⁷ *Wage Labour and Capital* sardonically provided one of the most telling summaries of the relationship between the capitalist workplace and the stunted development of the worker: "If the silkworm were to spin in order to continue its existence as a caterpillar, it would be a complete wage-worker."⁸

In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* Marx merely outlined the alienating nature of the capitalist labour process. Although much of his later work can be seen as an elaboration of many of its insights, it would take a century before a more sustained investigation of the capitalist labour process would be undertaken. Harry Braverman's *Labour and Monopoly Capital* elaborated the contemporary critique of the capitalist labour process. Braverman creatively argued that the variability of human labour necessitated a regulatory imperative on the part of capital. The fact that human labour is variable means that labour power can be set in motion by capital. And yet, at the same time, he noted that this same variability confronts the capitalist as a serious problem. To regulate effectively the rate of extraction of surplus value the capitalist must strive to manage and control the labour process.⁹ Hence, the rise of the managerial and

technological imperatives associated so acutely with the modern capitalism. Braverman contended that the history of capitalism, therefore, can be characterized as the destruction of the organic unity of human labour. The conceptualization of labour, the thinking about the labour process, came to be separated from the execution of labour or the doing of capitalist work. In the process capitalist work became simplified and continually refined. Moreover, this scientific rationalization and organization of the workplace – the proletarian labour form – has extended into most other areas of work. Very few work-sites are immune to successive phases of technologization, rationalization and refinement.

Critiques of Braverman drew attention to the importance of worker struggle and resistance within production sites, and raised the important concern that his writing presented the working class as a rather passive historical subject in the face of the managerial and scientific initiatives.¹⁰ Despite these critiques, the area of greatest consensus about the capitalist labour process has been the extent of de-skilling that typifies the capitalist workplace.¹¹ The general sense that the capitalist workplace has been dumbed down characterizes most critical commentary on the labour process. Most work requires little more than a brief period of familiarization. The skills required for work can be acquired in a matter of hours in most cases. In a typical workplace good sense and a brief set of instructions are sufficient.

The presence of the training regime still needs to be explained. A skeptical reader could be forgiven for asking: To what conceivable skills gap could the training regime be directed? The fact that workers are being told that their skill sets are inappropriate for the work in global capitalism sits awkwardly against the prosaic nature of most work. To make sense of the peculiar presence of the training regime analysts must reflect on it with reference to the nature of the much heralded changes that have occurred in the global economy over the last few decades. The training regime must be located within the evolving class struggles endemic to global capitalism.¹² When considered in this way analysis can throw the ideological notion of the new worker into relief and, in turn, open to view the relationship between the ideological construction of the new worker and the contemporary training regime.

The transition in the last three decades can be summarized as a transition from Fordism to globalization. Fordism rested essentially on two pillars: the Fordist production regime and the Keynesian policy framework. The supplanting of these pillars with the flexible production ethos and the neo-liberal policy framework has ushered in the era of globalization. More specifically, the Fordist principle of *mass production for mass consumption* along with its political presupposition of the *Fordist worker* – reasonably well-paid, unionized and protected by an array of labour laws – has yielded to the principle of *flexible production*, emphasizing more elastic production strategies and global market segmentation, and its attendant notion of the *flexible worker*. And to elaborate similarly on the decay of the second pillar, we see the systematic attack on the idea of Keynesian counter-cyclical state intervention and the promotion of radical free-

marketism that emphasizes unfettered investment and trading regimes and relentlessly attacks government so-called distortion of the labour market.¹³

Globalization, therefore, is a strategic shift in the preferred productive arrangements of capital, particularly transnational capital, and the active construction of an ideological edifice that undermines the Aprotected@northern worker and the super-exploitation of their vulnerable counterparts throughout the south. Although globalization is global in a geographic sense, especially as transnational capital has radiated around the world, it would be remiss to confuse this outward aspect of globalization for its inward political feature, namely, its political assault on working people to lower labour costs and to contain their political antipathies in the face of hardship. Globalization is not the ascendancy of humanity to loftier social vistas but rather an intensified attack on working people, beginning especially with the Fordist-type worker in the north. To outline the class content of the various sub-strategies of globalization including free-trade agreements, productive restructuring, privatization of public services, government downsizing and so forth would extend well beyond the scope of this paper.

An important part of this assault on working people coalesces around the mythologies of the noble toiler in the era of globalization.¹⁴ The notion of a Fordist worker – reasonably well paid, a member of a union as well as an employee of a firm, willing to work long hours in return for stable, long-term employment, protected by an array of laws governing labour relations and workplace conditions, and confident that the labour market and state social assistance would prevent one from personal misfortune and financial ruin – stood in the way of the transition to globalization. It should be stressed that not all workers fell under the Fordist labour umbrella, although many protections, especially the legal and social ones, tended towards universality. Although never enthusiastically embraced by capital in the north, the ideas and expectations about working life in the Fordist era could be tolerated as long as profitability rates were favourable. In the face of steep declines in profitability rates in the late 1960s and early 1970s that led capital to renovate their accumulation strategies, the Fordist labour regime came to be seen as sclerotic and uncompetitive from the perspective of capital – *viz* inflexible with respect to wages. A labour force with elevated expectations about wage levels, about the length and availability of employment, about the nature of workplace conditions and about a society's social obligations was inconsistent with the desired transition to more flexible accumulation strategies. The notion of the Fordist worker, therefore, has been slowly giving way to the notion of the Aflexi-worker@, a motivated member of the corporate team who is willing to move from job to job, to take flexible hours and to piece together a living on modest wages without expecting handouts from the state. Such a Aflexi-worker@ would be better suited to flexible production strategies that include extensive corporate relocation to the south, lean production methods, concerted efforts to match production with segmented markets, extensive industrial sub-contracting and the casualization of the workforce.

Amongst officialdom the Fordist idea of a stable, well-paying, long-term job came to be regarded as anachronous in a world of plant closures, chronic unemployment, welfare roll-backs and expanding part-time work and severe social disruptions among working people. The public perceptions of what constitutes a good worker with the right attitude, therefore, has been evolving over the last thirty years to conform to the exigencies of globalization. As an ideational package this re-conceptualization of the worker is about teaching workers to accept their fate as determined by the preferences of capital in the era of globalization. It is about ratcheting down expectations and getting workers to believe that notions of worker struggle and resistance are old-fashioned and out-dated. It is, ultimately, about pacifying and disciplining labour by undermining their collective power. As Anne Gray summarizes poignantly: AClass solidarity has no place in this framework.¹⁵

This shifting conception of a worker in late twentieth-century capitalism unfolded on many levels including debates and justifications about new directions in public policy, the rationalizations for specific government programs, public characterizations about labour struggles, especially strikes and wage-levels, journalistic stories lauding Anew workers@and their accomplishments in the era of globalization, academic discourse about the changing nature of work in the new economy and so forth.¹⁶ Although the classical Fordist-type worker is still present in substantial numbers, they are subjected to regular attacks in popular commentary, especially those in the public sector who endure a sort of Aworker-bashing@akin to the phenomenon of Apoor-bashing@that is so much a part of the neo-liberal agenda.

The ideological morass surrounding the creation of the new worker has helped to deepen exploitation in the era of globalization.¹⁷ Of course, despite the fact that this ideological assault proceeds on innumerable fronts, workers often see through the blandishments about the new worker in the post-Fordist economy, as evident in the continuing struggles inside and outside the workplace. It would be inappropriate to say that the ideological constructions regarding the new worker have fully congealed, especially given the fact that they are destined to be continually challenged from below. All the plush rhetoric in the world cannot override the frustrations and anxieties that working people feel in the era of globalization.¹⁸ The posture of officialdom is bound to look contrived and manipulative to many workers much of the time. Hence, the ideological construction of a noble toiler in the era of globalization is bound to be a fiercely contested area of contemporary life.

Nevertheless, in the last three decades there has been unmistakable gravitation towards a new hegemonic understanding about the ethos of work. The training regime enters into this contested reconstruction regarding a proper work ethic in the era of globalization. The training regime is one of the primary sites where the ideological construction of the new worker in global capitalism is elaborated and affirmed. This relationship is not immediately visible to unsuspecting commentators. On its surface, the training regime is packaged in an alluring manner. It deploys a language that appears to be about worker growth and well-being, and is replete with Enlightenment exaltations about worker

enrichment and happiness. It appeals to the strong desire in workers to learn, to augment their skills and to grow in confidence. This high-sounding presentation of the training regime, however, mystifies its unmistakable ideological function. It is a silky rhetoric that conceals the direct relationship between the training regime and the construction of the new worker aimed at intensifying exploitation.

There are three threads in the formal ideological pitch regarding the new worker that can be disentangled analytically. Each of these threads loosely corresponds to different facets of the training regime's catalyzing ideological function. First, the renewed narrative about the new worker locates a working person in a new kind of society. The lexicon of post-capitalist society, information economy, post-industrial, post-consumer or technological society vaguely signals a break from the conflictual eras of the past. In the new age knowledge and skills are of paramount importance. Productive life appears in this characterization as little more than a place where skills, expertise, entrepreneurial initiatives and corporate know-how are exchanged. The new society has left class struggle behind, and has become a stratiated society of consumer groups or milieux or habités. It is a society that delivers goods to these strata because it has adroitly encouraged the natural release of pent up entrepreneurial forces among its citizens. Within this discourse of the new society the new worker stands as one employee or citizen within the firm or nation. The new worker appears as part of a corporate family, and is understood to be performing in a hierarchical but mutually reinforcing relationship of productivity and quality. The new worker is as likely to be called an associate as an employee. A worker's fealty should be to the company, and ultimate responsibility must extend to the consumer or fellow citizen.

It is clear that this conceptualization of society transparently militates against worker solidarity and consolidation of class-based consciousness conducive to concerted political action. It discourages working people from thinking of themselves as members of a productive class, and strives to supplant such whimsy with ideas of membership in a consuming group or nation. In practice, class allegiances are decried as socially irresponsible special interests unfit for a globalizing world. The conception of the new worker, therefore, is part of the decomposition of politics in the era of globalization. It is a conception of society that actively de-politicizes globalization by characterizing it in a language that draws attention away from class-based issues and struggles. In the end, a society heavy with traditional conflicts over wages and typified by workers scrambling to eke out a living is being recast as a society soaring to grander social vistas plagued merely by technical problems in need of prudent managerial solutions.

The ideas about working life and society that inform the training regime fully accord with this emerging ethos of the new society and the worker's place in it. Beginning first with its wider social connotations and leitmotifs, the training regime participates in the construction of society as little more than an arena where the skills of employees must be matched with the demands of employers. Unemployment, underemployment and the anxiety about job loss are not taken to be problems rooted in the renovated accumulation

strategies of capital but are rather reinvented as inconveniences to be endured by working people, inconveniences caused by the evolution of the post-industrial society and the insufficiency of past training programs. The challenge for society centres around the technical problem of calibrating skill sets with the rapidly evolving economy, of harmonizing the supply of skills with the demands for skills in a high-tech world. The rich and brutal political struggle of globalization is reduced to an arithmetic disjunction between the quantity of skills supplied and the quantity of skill demanded.¹⁹

Secondly, it de-politicizes the workplaces of globalization by conceptualizing them as sites where individual skills must articulate with the skill requirements of an employer. The notion that a workplace is likely to be a site of rising abuse, of racial or sexual discrimination or of intensified exploitation is marginalized by this sanitized formulation that constructs them as venues in need of competent, highly skilled, well trained, reasonably experienced staff. Qualitative issues surrounding workplace conditions and low-wage work give way to fictionalized representations of the workplace in need of high-end skills, especially those workplaces touched by computers.

Lastly, the training regime de-politicizes the condition of individual workers by transforming their plight into questions about personal skill sets. To a worker buffeted around by the punishing accumulation strategies of capital, the training regime effectively advises her that her unemployment, her irregular work, her job insecurity or even her poverty are rooted in personal deficiencies. Only training can provide salvation in the face of unemployment or the fear of job loss in the new post-industrial economy.

Moreover, this downloading of culpability completes a foggy political circuit by encouraging workers to believe that they are in a struggle against each other and to lose sight of the policies and practices that truly author their fate.²⁰ Even the training regime's hubris regarding full employment quickly surrenders to the more realistic characterization of a training regime whereby one worker's training-to-job circuit is the loss for another worker who failed to receive the proper training. One trainee's leg-up is nothing more than another worker's heightened vulnerability. The political consequences of workers gazing suspiciously at each other rather than casting their eyes upwards at the boardrooms of capital need no elaboration.²¹ The training regime, in consequence, inculcates the view that the virtuous response of a worker awash in anxiety and fear in the era of globalization is not to collectivize to resist the predilections of capital but rather to persevere in the acquisition of more and more skills so that she might prevail over other workers in a tight job market.

This idea takes us to the second thread in the construction of the new worker, namely, the idea of worker self-sufficiency. Workers are reminded that it is no longer deemed acceptable to rely upon the state for assistance in times of trouble. Society does not exist to provide handouts; it should only offer a hand up to avoid creating dependencies. The notion of the new worker, therefore, is wrapped up with the resurrection of the Victorian notion of self-help. Workers must take it upon themselves to survive the twists and turns of the globalizing economy.

The training regime encourages a general understanding consistent with the idea that workers must take initiative and help themselves. Workers are encouraged to assess their levels of skill and to think in terms of matching such skills with the needs of employers. The Canadian state encourages its citizens to think of themselves as *AME Inc.* A good worker must recognize and acknowledge one's skills gaps and strive to correct them. A good worker must not dwell on personal economic misfortune, such as sudden unemployment after years of loyal service to a company, but rather focus on the opportunities that training can provide. A good worker should not wallow in self-pity or, worse still, develop a loathing for the system, but rather seize the opportunity afforded by job loss and enter different training programs. A good worker must be innovative, be creative, and be a risk-taker. It is simply no longer appropriate to expect handouts from society, but rather to take charge and equip oneself with the necessary job-related capacities through initiative and hard work.

Such thinking, of course, helps to dampen social expectations in a era of growing hardship and chronic economic dislocation among working people. The training regime encourages working people to believe that success and well-being can be obtained only through personal achievements measured in terms of the industrious acquisition of *skill sets.* Neo-liberal doctrine advises working people to help themselves, and the training regime is presented as the avenue through which workers can forge personal improvements.

The third thread surrounding the cultural redesign of a worker in the era of globalization surrounds the idea of flexibility. The worker must shed the antiquated idea that she will have one or two jobs during her lifetime. A worker must be open to short-term jobs, to limited contractual employment, to frequent periods of job in-between-ness and, in the end, to many jobs over the course of one's adult life. A good job might only last a few years, or even only a few months. One must be responsive to the undulating nature of the global economy, to move with global economic tides, and respond creatively to the waxing and waning nature of the job market. A good worker, therefore, excels at selling oneself, and sees job-seeking as a virtuous or even noble activity. Moreover, an employee must be flexible with respect to hours and scheduling. Part-time work, split-shifting and being *on call* are part of the right attitude in a world that is variable and that never really goes to sleep.

The array of programs and practices that constitute the training regime is the institutional support for the *flexworker.* It is the policy regime that allows workers to *be-tool.* A flexible worker must *learn a living* as well as *learn a living.* A worker's skills must evolve continually to match the evolving economy. A worker should not stand still or be content with skills acquired in the past. A worker, moreover, never really can have too many skills in the era of flexible production. A worker must continually augment their basket of skills and be ready to deploy them as the economy demands. The training regime thus figures prominently in the efforts to create social understanding congruent with the casualization of labour. As Manfred Bienefeld summarized: *Slogans like the*

need for >permanent retraining= or for >lifetime learning= are widely used to describe and justify the casualisation of labour which is creating a world in which workers are paid what it takes to get them to the factory gate each day, hoping the straw boss will give them the nod.²²

The training regime, we submit, is accomplishing considerably more than this politically. It contributes to the political withering of globalization and its fierce anti-worker agenda. The training regime is an organizing site of ideological struggle where neo-liberal ideas regarding social obligations and the citizen-worker's virtuous membership in that society are rehearsed. The worker is essentially cast as a repository of skills in a society bereft of social obligations. Indeed, society often appears as little more than an arena of colliding entrepreneurialisms. The training regime, in the end, is training in name only for a society in name only.

The Training Regime and Labour

This section of the paper examines the analyses and understandings of the training regime on the part of union officials involved with the provision of training in New Brunswick. In the open-ended interviews the interviewees were encouraged to speak on issues and themes that they deemed important. The following questions were among those posed: "Are training programs important?" "Are they in the interest of workers?" "What should organized labour's role be (if any) in providing training?" "Are the kinds of training that are always in the long-term interests of working people in the province?"

As intimated in our previous discussion, labour's response to the training regime is a mix of scepticism and enthusiastic embrace. In part labour leaders involved in training articulated concerns regarding the impact of training on, for example, older workers. They recognized the cynicism of workers who are doubtful of a job at the end of their training and who are demeaned by the requirement to retrain at something, no matter what, to retain their (un)employment insurance benefits. At the same time, though, labour embraces the rationale behind the training regime, accepts that there is a significant skills gap, and believes that training which calibrates skill sets with job requirements leads to greater employment for workers, especially as their firms become more competitive in a globalizing world.

That labour expresses such contradictory views should be no surprise. Speaking of the generalized contradictory tensions within society, labour leaders are sensitive to the resistance on the shop floor to training that is often seen as redundant and as pitting workers against each other, especially older against younger workers. They are also acutely sensitive to the various strategies capital has used in its efforts to lower wages, including plant closures and relocations, outsourcing and scabbing. The practices and ideological representations that accompany the hegemonic order, however, in no way blinds organized labour to the real presence of counter-hegemonic ideas, especially within working class consciousness where the immediate experience of oppression and

exploitation is a daily fact. Ongoing challenges to the authority of the boss, resistance to the dumbing down of work, the struggle against diminishing living standards, job insecurity, and dangerous workplaces coexist with a resigned acceptance of the status quo. These tensions point broadly to the recognition, sometimes vague and sometimes keenly expressed, that workers have a panoply of more authentic interests, including those coalescing around the issue of training and education for working people.

We found these broad contradictory moments recapitulated in labour's response to the training regime. All our interviewees expressed the view that training is important for workers, and that more training and wider access is in labour's interest. Organized labour, it was reiterated, must get involved because business and government have not provided enough access. In fact, it was commonly lamented that labour should have been involved sooner, and must in future insure that improved training programs be an important goal of contact negotiations.

This basic contradictory tenor can be found in more formal discussions of training by organized labour. An early (1989) document by the Canadian Labour Congress entitled *We Can Do It: Invest in Training and Restore U.I.* articulated key aspects of the underlying contradiction we are drawing out. The CLC directly confronted the government's interpretation of a skills gap. They wrote, *The Tories want Canadians to believe that unemployment is not the result of their economic policies but a result of poor worker skills, a problem created by the workers themselves.* (CLC, 107) A few paragraphs later they note the pervasiveness of this analysis of the economy. *Others, in the media and elsewhere, have bought into the view that unemployment is due to the lack of worker skills and they promote training and retraining as substitutes for income support to the unemployed and job creation measures by the government.* (CLC, 108)

However, this recognition that the *skills gap* is not responsible for unemployment, that workers cannot be blamed for the long term trajectories of the economy, is immediately followed by the dual assertions that training is a right and a necessity and that *good* training would involve the unions more actively in the development and implementation of training policies and programs. *Labour believes training is a right.* (CLC, 114) Again: *The content of training must be geared to workers' needs as they see them and must be developmental.* (CLC, 114) And with respect to the inclusivity of training: *A job skills training must be structured to correct the exclusion of women, visible minorities and persons with disabilities.* (CLC, 115) *Workers and their unions must play a central role in determining at all levels, the direction of training. . . This requires labour/business parity on all training and adjustment boards, committees and councils.* (CLC., 117) The CLC document is critical of the way that various governments have institutionalized training programs, criticizes training as a replacement for welfare or unemployment insurance, and expresses the need for more open access to training. It does not, however, dispute the need for training despite its own claims that the *skills gap* is a manufactured crisis.

Our interviewees expressed similar support for the need for unions to be involved in training. It was argued that training is necessary even though this need is not always felt by workers themselves. **It** is true that we have comments from workers saying that there is exaggeration in the prerequisites required to do jobs ... Personally, I will never buy that even if it comes from workers. **At** the same moment, however, concern was expressed that the training needed was not being provided adequately either by business – “Employers going through layoffs want to provide a severance package, that’s it, goodbye [without retraining]” – or by the New Brunswick government – “The McKenna government discredited the trades ... everyone would have a job in the new technology” resulting in a **discrediting** in the last ten years of the trades= skills. **As** a consequence, labour must be involved in the provision of training, even if this interest is coming late in the day. **It** was not easy in the labour movement to talk about training until now because it was always the last topic on the agenda. **However,** **now** we are talking about the need for workplace skills development continually in the workplace so that when you get to the point of this transition from this job to out of the workforce and into another job, you’ve got the skills.

There is a certain ambivalence on the part of our interviewees regarding the so-called **skills gap**. As we found in the discussions on the need for union involvement there was a sense of a greater scepticism regarding the need for training and a skills gap by rank and file than by union leaders. New technologies in the workplace were frequently cited as the reason for the need for continual retraining. **Training** and retraining are part of lifelong learning particularly when it comes to your job. New technology in the workplace requires new sets of skills and so training and retraining are legitimate. **Workers** are seen as critical of the failure of government to provide them the opportunities to overcome their personal skills-gap through access to training. **In** the case of the individual, if he or she doesn’t have the requisite qualifications to continue working or to get back into the job market, they ask themselves why isn’t that opportunity [to receive training] there for me?

Yet, there is a recognition that many rank and file consider the skills gap to be a sham, a fiction created by employers. Citing the example of the requirement that Registered Nursing Assistants working in nursing homes were required to upgrade their skills significantly even though their job requirements were essentially the same, one interviewee commented that **I** think with some workers there is the feeling that employers establish arbitrarily high standards of skills ... that aren’t always necessary to perform the work There is no ground for some of the qualifications that are set for jobs. **Another** reiterated a similar point: **There** is a lot of hype around this idea that people don’t have jobs because they don’t have the necessary skills, which is partly true but a lot of this is not necessarily true because for a lot of jobs that are coming out you don’t need a lot of skills. I don’t think that workers feel that there is much of a skills gap.

If many workers themselves are sceptical of the existence of a skills gap and, hence, the need for training, then it may understandably be asked why labour embraces the training agenda, even if with reservation? The answer, as we have seen, is found partly in their

understanding of the effects of new technological developments and partly in their reading of the axiom that firms face greater competition in the post-Fordist era and, in addition, that the competitiveness of any given firm is largely conditioned by the skills of the workforce. Hence, training is seen as a way to save jobs. Globalization generally is understood to mean that most jobs are precarious from the perspective of workers. Union leaders see corporate mobility as a threat to employment that can, partly at least, be responded to by improving the skill level of the workforce. ARight now, they [corporations] can move anywhere@was an idea commonly expressed. Secondly, as a result, unless Athe incumbent work force is given the opportunity or takes advantage of the opportunity of upgrading their skills to match the new technology then the employer is not going to produce in an efficient enough manner or with sufficient quality to properly market@their product. Labour, therefore, is seen as needing to take responsibility for its own employment by responding to the new post-Fordist production regime: AThe country or the region of the country that has the most highly skilled, well trained and well educated workforce will be the most successful country in this global economy.@

The union's role in the provision of training is seen as critical especially with respect to the impact of new technologies upon the ability of workers to retain jobs and the related concern about overall union strength. Their function is to insure that their members are given the necessary retraining to retain employment within the bargaining unit. For example, when New Brunswick's hospital corporations introduced computers into the workplace unions fought for the retraining. AThe employer would have preferred to bring in someone [from outside the bargaining unit] who was already trained.@The union fought successfully to prevent this and keep its members' jobs. AUnions will fight when there is new technology that comes in to the workplace. Workers will be retrained and that is happening a lot more.@

Not only do unions encourage retraining as a way of protecting its members from competition from outside the bargaining unit, the training also functions to regulate intra-unit competition. Union leaders see a critical role for union involvement in the distribution of retraining opportunities within bargaining units. For example, a firm may wish to retrain workers to use new equipment. Their preference may be to retrain younger workers. This violates the union principle of seniority and so a great deal of effort and negotiation is expended to insure that seniority rules apply to retraining opportunities. This is the basis of the agreement in place at Brunswick Mines where the union is administering a government-funded retraining program. Similarly, concern was expressed with regard to the building trades that government sponsored training through Community Colleges would Ado what they did 15 years ago and run course after course after course and flood the market We want some say on what training they are going to do and how many they are going to train.@One interviewee summed up the difference between unionized and non-unionized training. ATo the extent that the [retraining opportunity] is happening in an arbitrary way it is going to create ill will in the workplace and it is at odds with building solidarity in the workplace.@

Furthermore, many of those interviewed felt strongly that labour's involvement provides training that is more efficient, flexible and responsive to the needs of both workers and industry. Its knowledge of the job requirements at the level of the shop floor means that it is more sensitive to calibrating properly the skill needs and abilities of business and labour. AI just think that you get a much more diversified training if labour is involved. We can deliver a wider breadth of skills because we are in contact with the trades everyday. They believe that labour can provide workers with more employable skills than they would get from either government programs, such as those found in New Brunswick's system of community colleges, or from company-sponsored training.

Workers themselves, though, were reported to be more sceptical about the value of any training program. They were sensitive to some, at least, of the contradictions inhering in the new training regime. Understandably their primary concern, or sensed problem, with the training push can be summarized as Atraining for what? Various interviewees made reference to the reluctance of rank and file to train for jobs that likely did not exist. It was noted that their scepticism was higher in the Northern regions (or predominantly Acadian) of the Province which have traditionally had high seasonal unemployment and have experienced increased unemployment especially because of declining fish stocks. AThey have been working in a sector where there has been downsizing, especially in the basic sectors like fisheries where there is less jobs so when we are talking about reskilling them or retraining them. I think a number of them have resisted because they are asking themselves retraining for what? What kind of jobs will be there? Again: AEspecially in the North ... the retraining that they are talking about is not necessarily towards a job but is just retraining instead of being on U.I. It was reported that workers actively resent training when they see that it does not lead directly to future employment. AThere are not a lot of jobs [particularly in the Acadian areas of the Province] ... so the question is why should we go through all of this training if there are no real jobs out there. This was especially true of the fish plant workers who resented even literacy training when they felt that their traditional industry, and the skills they had developed for it through the years, were gone forever.

Through the interviews we learned that this generalized resentment was felt most keenly by older workers. Most of those we interviewed reiterated this point. Older workers resented training partly because they were more likely to perceive it as not leading to a job. In part, as well, they were concerned that training pit them in competition for jobs with younger workers who were likely to have had greater access to training in the past and who would likely benefit more from it in the future. AFor workers who are older, it is how it is presented. It is what they can see at the end of it. The reality, however, is that there are fewer job opportunities for older workers who have completed training. Hence, Afor younger workers there is less of a resistance to training.

Differing attitudes to training between younger and older workers raised the question of competition between workers both *for* training and especially *as a result of* training. This latter point in particular was frequently raised during our interviews. Training a worker may give her or him additional job skills and may increase their chances for employment.

However, in an economy where there is a surplus of labour, as there is in New Brunswick, one worker's advantage was keenly felt to be another's disadvantage. Raising the skill level of one group of workers provides them with advantages; there was recognition that it does not provide an advantage to the working class as a whole. In fact, it was felt that by weakening such egalitarian union principles as seniority it can even weaken the overall position of workers as a class by decreasing solidarity and increasing competition. For decades the slogan of the union movement has been 'solidarity forever,' and it was widely recognized among our interviewees that the training regime undermines solidarity and increases competitiveness between workers.

They differed, though, on their understanding of the value or impact of this newly increased competition, reflecting tensions within the overall outlook of union leadership. Some argued that it creates a 'healthy competition' that will lead to greater efficiency and productivity. Others were more fearful of the consequences. For example: 'Standards that are arbitrarily set and demands for skills training and if you do not meet this arbitrarily defined standard, particularly in a non-union environment and even in some cases in unionized situations your ability to advance will be severely limited and then you have no choice but to pursue additional training or retraining because you are fearful of losing your current job and not being able to advance, and so this creates competition among workers.'

A related line of query and commentary encouraged reflection upon the type of training that might be unequivocally in the interests of workers as a class, and not simply as competitive individuals? Most interviewees mentioned both literacy training and training in the history of labour and the union movement. Many reported that some labour education and even some education in union history and working class struggles form an integral part of training programs. It is also important to note that the interviewees in the building trades strongly believed that their training centres around the provision of invaluable education and skills integral to safe and successful work, that their sense of what should be learned and how experience should be acquired emerged directly out of the unique working histories of plumbers, bricklayers, electricians, carpenters and so forth, and, perhaps most importantly, that only such qualified people who come directly out of these worker-controlled trades should be providing education and training in the building trades.

Interestingly, a number also referred to training in civics issues – how the Canadian Parliamentary system operates; how to influence and access effectively one's Member of Parliament; the how to, and the value of, participation in political life as democratic citizens. That is, it was argued that if labour could access democratic processes of decision-making more effectively it could structure the training regime to accommodate better the interests of working people. Typical was the statement that 'the ability of the individual to participate in the community is so limited when they lack the literacy skills. They are disenfranchised from democracy. They are not participating in the democratic process. They are part of the 60 or 65 per cent who rarely get out to vote and if they do get out to vote they are not voting from their own knowledge or their own analysis but

from the information they can get from television and five or six second sound bites...
We want to see the masses not be ignorant and take their place in society. @

Skills training was frequently juxtaposed to training that enhanced the whole person and furthered their overall welfare as against their specific job interest. A The vision is that training shouldn't be limited. It shouldn't be in a small box. It should be for skill but also for participating in the general society. Depending on the level of the worker it is important to give the worker an idea of where he or she fits in the system either in the company or in the community. @ Such an understanding of the processes of democratic politics is not sensitive to important debates regarding the autonomy of the state and political decision-making. The left generally has voiced concern over the liberal idea that state is a neutral umpire of conflicts within the socio-economic realm and that it acts independently to maximize economic efficiency. The formal equality of democratic politics often hides real economic and social (and political) inequality. As such, reliance upon a reforming mechanism that centres A democratic participation @ by individual workers is at best a contested strategy and, at worst, doomed to failure.

Conclusion

It is in this mystified political project of globalization that we should begin to unpack the contemporary training regime. It transforms a profoundly political struggle into technical questions; reduces issues about power and human dignity to bland considerations about job preparation and quantity of work-related experience. When we reflect upon the Taylorising of the workplace in industrial capitalism the extent of the political pacification inherent in the discourse on training is looms large. Indeed, the training regime is one of the key sites in the management of the northern working class during globalization.

Labour must navigate through the Janus-faced character of the education and training issue. It must avoid sublimating the brutal political struggle at the heart of globalization by embracing exaggerated notions of social skills gaps. Such a repression of labour's political savvy would come at a most costly time. Rather, labour must rather embrace those educational issues that are in the real interests of working people. We have found that some of these more authentic educational issues are recognized and even encouraged by labour, especially literacy programs and education in working class history. And in the building trades where Taylorised incursions are less frequent we certainly witness more worker-centred training practices. It is in the lessons of these programs that the political sublimation can be arrested and training for workers can be furthered and, most importantly, married to the general struggle of working people in the era of globalization.

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Endnotes

1. Silver Donald Cameron, *The Education of Everett Richardson: The Nova Scotia Fishermen's Strike 1970-71*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1977). Indeed, the chapters in Cameron's book C
A Grade School: Who Needs a Union@, A High School: On Strike@, A University: Not a Contract to Write Home
About@ and so forth C correspond to formal levels of schooling in Canadian society. Cameron emphasizes
that the A country cunning@ and A unofficial life@ of the striking families allowed them to develop insights into
the real issues and struggles relating to the strike. It was a education in the grandest sense of the word.

2. The distinction between core and peripheral jobs does have a geographic correspondence. Core jobs are
not found in the core capitalist countries as might be suspected by the residual connotation of the literature
on dependency Both types of jobs will be found in any contemporary capitalist societies. For an elaboration
of the core/periphery distinction see Robert W. Cox, *Production, Power and World Order: Social Forces in
the Making of History* (Columbia University Press, 1987).

3. Even the education and training in many of these fields will evince a character that is affected by the
need to take the control of the labour process out of the hands of working people, and thus cannot be
assumed to correspond purely to the objective requirements of A high-end@ work. For a discussion of such
issues see David F. Noble, *Progress without People: New Technology, Unemployment, and the Message of
Resistance*, (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1995).

4. Robert Schrank, *Ten Thousand Working Days*, (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1978), pp. 69-70.
Schrank elaborated on the extent of his dissatisfaction: "It was hard for me to believe how my productivity
increased once I had gotten the valve-rebuilding production line in operation. My motivation had been to
get rid of tedious work, but I was being cited by the boss for having saved him x number of dollars. But
hero or not I had had it with valve rebuilding, and I told Anderson I would be happy never to see another
valve again in my life." p. 70.

5. Karl Marx, *Capital* v. 1., (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), p. 481.

6. Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*, (London: Penguin, 1967) pp. 87-8.

7. Marx, *Paris Manuscripts*, (Moscow: International Publishers, 1964), p. 109.

8. Karl Marx, *Wage Labour and Capital* (Progress, 1976), p. 21.

9. Harry Braverman, *Labour and Monopoly Capital*, (Monthly Review Press, 1974). See especially chapter
one entitled A Labour and Labour Power,@ especially pp. 56-57.

10. For example see Michael Burawoy, *Manufacturing Consent: Changes in the Labour Process Under
Monopoly Capitalism* (University of Chicago Press, 1979).

11. A proliferation of responses to Braverman appeared following the publication of his work, although his untimely death did not allow him to respond to his critics. It is significant that a writer such as Burawoy would later describe his own work as a complement to Braverman, an assessment that we feel better responds to the richness of the latter's argument. See Burawoy's *Flight from Capitalism* in *Work, Difference and Social Change: Two Decades after Braverman's Labour and Monopoly Capital Conference Proceedings*, May 8-10, 1998, State University of New York, Binghamton, New York.
12. As Phil Mizen recently wrote in his analysis of youth training in Britain: *It may be grinding, everyday, unspectacular class struggle, but it must be understood as class struggle all the same, and it is from here that further research and analysis should begin.* See *In and Against the Training State*, *Capital and Class* 53 (Summer 1994), pp. 99-121.
13. A thorough but un-theoretical survey of these changes can be found in William Greider, *One World, Ready or Not: The Manic Logic of Global Capitalism*, (New York: Touchstone, 1998).
14. Although we have teased out the aspects of the new worker from a number of sources this analysis is partly indebted to Anne Gray, *The Flexibilisation of Labour and the Attack on Workers' Living Standards*, *Common Sense* no. 18, pp. 12-33.
15. Anne Gray, *New Labour C New Labour Discipline*, *Capital and Class* 65 (Summer 1998), p. 2.
16. Well-received academic commentary also must be understood to be entering into this process of ideological regeneration. For example, see Jeremy Rifkin, *The End of Work*.
17. The notion of the *new worker*, to elaborate, involves a partial shift in one of the fundamental regions of consciousness in modern life, that is, intersubjective understandings about work and working life.
18. For an overview of the apprehensions and misgivings of working people in the era of the new worker see Jamie Swift, *Wheel of Fortune: Work and Life in the Age of Falling Expectations*, (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1995).
19. Other writers have commented on this characterization from the standpoint of its ideological function. As John Shields writes: *The rhetoric of skill enhancement ... stands in stark contrast to the reality of contemporary labour-market developments and conditions in which 'learnfare', for instance, becomes a disciplinary tool to achieve public sector fiscal restraint and a greater labour market flexibility.* See *Flexible Work, Labour Market Polarization, and the Politics of Skills Training and Enhancement*, in *The Training Trap: Ideology, Training and the Labour Market*, eds. Dunk et al (Fernwood, 1996).
20. In this sense the training regime performs a function similar to the re-structuring of work inside the workplace C lean production methods and the adoption of team work for example C that brings workers into competition with each other. For example, see Bonnie Fox and Pamela Sugiman, *Flexible Work, Flexible Workers: The Restructuring of Clerical Work in a Large Telecommunications Company*, *Studies in Political Economy* 60 (Autumn 1999), pp. 59-84.
21. Indeed, the very idea that a worker is a *trainee* flags the critical disaggregative ideological function of the state whereby workers are at one point a *parent*, then a *taxpayer*, then a *patient*, then a *citizen*, then a member of the public and so forth. To speak of the worker as a member of a class is to *break cover* as the London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group once expressed it. See *In and Against the State* (Pluto, 1980), especially chapter 2.
22. Manfred Bienefeld, *Capitalism and the Nation State in the Dog Days of the Twentieth Century*, *Socialist Register* (London: The Merlin Press, 1994), pp. 113-114.

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