

# **Born of Different Visions: Labour Education in Canada and the US**

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## **Born of Different Visions: Labour Education in Canada and the US**

Contrary to their US counterparts, who have drawn extensively on the expertise of university- and college-based educators to design and implement their worker education programming, Canadian labour unions have tended to develop their own, "in-house," programming with only marginal support from university- and college-based personnel. The relative economic success of both nations in the post-war period has provided little impetus to compare the respective merits of these antithetical visions of worker education provision, which some suggest may be a product of the differing social mores of the two nations. Of late, however, Canadian and US workers have been impacted significantly by the destabilizing and disorienting effects of the developed world's transition from an industrial to a *postindustrial* regime of production.

Characterized by increasingly flexible employment practices, a globalized division of labour, greater geographical mobility, deindustrialization of the West, an increasingly powerful and autonomous world financial system, and unprecedented advances in information technology, this new regime of production is rapidly displacing its industrial predecessor. Given that Canadian workers are being confronted with the oftentimes trying consequences of this transition on an almost daily basis, the need for educational programming that helps prepare them for the challenges of this new production era is becoming a particularly pressing one.

However, efforts to develop and implement a new model of worker education provision may be prematurely thwarted if the factors, events, and circumstances that have contributed to the development of Canada's existing model of provision are not properly understood. To this end, the proposed paper will map out the provision of worker education in Canada and compare it to provision in the US, noting similarities and differences. It will explore differences in curricula and in the relationships between educational providers and union clients, identifying circumstances and issues that have contributed to the development of antithetical modes of provision in the two countries. It will conclude by addressing the implications of such findings for worker education and non-formal adult education provision in the North American context.