



national
union

research

In Defense of
Apprenticeship
Training

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Apprenticeship – an important investment for Canada

Apprenticeship is a tried and true method of training that has evolved and adapted to the needs of the day and has served us well. During this time it has served the needs of employers and employees alike and has proven an effective, efficient method of training.

Generally, apprenticeships last for four years and there are some 169 trades and some 130,000 workers serving apprenticeships in Canada today. Over the last decade, apprenticeships have accounted for approximately 1% of the labour force, compared to 6% of the workforce in Germany.¹

Only 22% of private sector employers in Canada employ apprentices and public sector employers employ significantly less numbers of apprentices, figures that underscore the abominably low level of training in the employment sectors.² Funding for apprenticeship programs has been from three sources: employers, the federal government, and to varying degrees, provincial governments.

A wise investment

Public funding of apprenticeship training must be looked at for what it has the potential to be – a wise investment for a good rate of return. The apprentice exchanges his/her labour at a reduced rate of pay for a period of time often to the benefit of the employer in order to learn the skills of a trade to qualify for journey person status in the chosen trade. In return for a very modest investment of public funds, the individual apprentice completes a program as a certified journey person and finishes with a significant body of new skills and abilities. This journey person is able to take on a well-paid job that will contribute to tax revenues. A key element in Canada's industrial training system, the apprenticeship program is also one of the best bargains in the educational system.

The current attack on apprenticeship programs

In the last three years, however, the federal government has abandoned its role in apprenticeship training by slashing expenditures destined for apprenticeship programs. Some provinces are committed to filling the funding gap created by the

¹ Canadian Labour Force Development Board, Expansion of the Apprenticeship Training System, 1994.

² Gordon DiGiacomo, The Citizen, March 19, 1994.

federal government, while others are trying to 'patch' their system without replacing the lost financial resources. This is all taking place under the guise of 'restructuring,' but the driving force behind this restructuring is fiscally-driven. This is a short-sighted economic strategy that could well find Canada without sufficient skilled workers to build the foundations of the 21st century.

Each province seems to be going its own way in restructuring their apprenticeship program. This has led to a certain fragmentation and a parochial approach to apprenticeship training. Nevertheless the current reform of apprenticeship training across the country involves common themes in all provinces. These common themes are 'flexibility,' reduced regulation, alternative delivery models, increased tuition fees, and annual licensing fees for journey persons.

**Ontario's Proposed
Apprenticeship and Certification
Act, 1998 (Bill 55)**

The Conservative Government of Ontario is undertaking to overhaul the Apprenticeship system in the province, much to the detriment of workers and youth. Had it not been for the determined efforts of the labour movement, the government would have passed this regressive piece of legislation without proper public hearings. Hearings have been set for November 1998.

**Voluntary guidelines set by
industry**

Trade unions in Ontario are concerned about the devastating outcome of Bill 55, as it calls for the removal of regulations on employers. Regulations would be substituted for voluntary guidelines. This means that employers could establish their own standards of apprenticeship and skilled trades, leading to confusion within the workplace and marketplace, not to mention the erosion of national standards.

Eliminating the two-year contract

Other sections of the proposed Bill, which fall under voluntary measures and guidelines developed by industry, include the elimination of the two-year contract, whereas it would no longer be required to serve two years in an apprenticeship program. We believe that the elimination of the two-year requirement, coupled with the elimination of apprentices to journey persons ratios, will lead to lower levels of skills for Ontario workers.

Eliminating ratios

Eliminating wage requirements

The Ontario Government also proposed to abolish the wage requirements for apprentices, while at the same time, imposing tuition and administrative fees on apprenticeship programs. This means that first year apprentices would no longer have to be paid at least 40% of a journey person's rate, as is currently the case today. In addition, apprentices would be required to pay for the in-school portion of apprenticeship training. Not only would this discourage young people from entering apprenticeship programs, it would deal yet another blow to public sector education institutions which are the primary deliverers of apprenticeship programs.

Imposing tuition and administrative fees

Lowering the minimum age requirement

Bill 55 has been introduced as a remedy for youth unemployment in Ontario. However, the proposed *Apprenticeship and Certification Act, 1998* is a recipe for disaster. Under the proposed legislation, completion of grade 12 would no longer be required to enter into an apprenticeship program. Not only does the Government want to lower the minimum age to 16 years of age, it wants to lower the educational attainment to grade 10! While this measure doesn't do nearly enough to foster a highly skilled workforce, it has the potential to trigger massive drop-out rates from post-secondary institutions.

The Apprenticeship program is in need of reform

Our members are the first to recognize that reform of apprenticeship training is needed to make training more responsive to the needs of industry. However, reform of the system must take into account the needs of **all partners** in apprenticeship training, not just those of industry and the overwhelming desire of provincial governments to cut deficits.

Need of adequate funding

A major responsibility of governments is one of supporting the apprenticeship system by providing adequate funding to ensure a high level of educational training within the apprenticeship program. Both levels of government (federal and provincial) must contribute to the costs of investing in apprenticeship programs in Canada. Federal funding and support for apprenticeship, through the EI Fund should be restored to at least former levels. The federal government in cooperation with provincial governments need to make a well supported apprenticeship system a key part of

their industrial development strategy and economic policies.

Government has an obligation to administer the apprenticeship program by seeing that employers are providing proper opportunities to apprentices on the job for the guidance and training that an indentured apprentice could and should expect during the apprenticeship. Government must make sure that the apprenticeship program meets the standards set by employers and labour representative, through the trade advisory committee structure.

The role of provincial governments

Government also has the obligation to work with public sector training institutions to make sure that the facilities and equipment required to deliver the in-school technical training portion of the apprenticeship meet the requirements and objectives of the industry-established course outlines. Curriculum and program development are also areas that standards set by industry need be reviewed and maintained by government acting as a facilitator between the partners in delivery of training.

The role of regulation

We question any premise that reduced regulation will work in the area of apprenticeship training. In our view there are no substitutes equivalent to effective and enforced legislation covering apprenticeship training. Equally, there are no substitutes for sufficient field staff to ensure adherence to and enforcement of standards. No amount of 'self-monitoring' by industry will achieve the key objectives of setting standards, protecting consumers, ensuring worker health and safety, and monitoring the supply of skilled labour and other areas of the public interest in a modern industrial nation. The marketplace has not and will not be able to provide for consumer protection, adequate health and safety provisions and high standards in training. Only specific legislation with an enforcement mechanism can provide the standards in these areas that the public expects and demands.

All aspects of the apprenticeship system should be regulated. Government has traditionally set the requirements for examinations and the content of examinations in order to protect the standards for the

trade. Government also has the responsibility for the issuance of certificates of Apprenticeship and Qualification which maintain the guarantee of assuring a highly skilled workforce.

The primary deliverers of the in-school portion of apprenticeship programs are public community colleges across Canada. Colleges have traditionally provided the infrastructure for the training and development of the generic skills and many specific skills that an apprentice needs to complete his/her journey person status.

Community colleges: The primary deliverers of apprenticeship programs

The level of apprenticeship activity varies from college to college and province to province, but it is a significant portion of programs at most colleges. The faculties in apprenticeship programs are the highly skilled and qualified instructors employed by the colleges and the many different types of educational support workers who aid these instructors. Those instructors often come from the shop floor and are qualified in the trades they teach. The majority of community college staff is represented by components of the **National Union of Public and General Employees** and as such are committed to defending the public post-secondary system and infrastructure as the primary delivery site for technical training in apprenticeship programs.

We believe that the community colleges system should continue to be the primary deliverer of apprenticeship training. An increase funding level needs to be provided immediately to enable community colleges to provide the “flexibility” being sought while maintaining, or better yet, improving the quality and level of expertise so urgently needed by industry. The college system offers the following advantages:

- proven ability to respond to needs
- clear accountability to the public
- experienced college staff
- a history of involvement in program and curriculum development
- counselling, library and other services for the apprentice
- colleges are easier to regulate

- existing infrastructure which is already paid for
- the reputation of institution adds to the value of the apprentice's certification.

Finally, it must be emphasized that college training has a general component and this reduces the possibility of providing training that is too employer-specific. Generic skills training will reduce the need for costly retraining when a trades person changes jobs. There are no dead ends in college training, and delivery in colleges of the technical in-school training portion of apprenticeship which, when examined in-depth, is significantly more than the 10% it is seen by many to be.

The cyclical nature to apprenticeship training

There is a cyclical nature to the demand for apprenticeship training. The cycle mirrors the economic health of a province. When a province is booming there are many apprentices to train. When our economy is in a downturn the number of apprentices is reduced. We must avoid a tendency to divest in apprenticeship training during the down phase of the cycle. Community colleges have been cutting their apprenticeship activities during the most recent downturn. The consequences of these short-sighted decisions are that we will have insufficient skilled trades persons during the following boom, and we will have damaged the training infrastructure already bought and paid for by taxpayers. Rebuilding the infrastructure will be an extremely costly endeavour. Creative proposals to minimize this boom/bust phenomenon have been developed in several colleges across Canada, including the possibility of allowing parts of the in-school portion of apprenticeship to be completed prior to employment as an apprentice.

Funding of the apprenticeship program

There should not be student tuition fees for participating in an apprenticeship program. If any fees are to be paid, they should be paid by the 'partners' who benefit the most -- the sponsoring employer and the governments that benefit from taxes generated by the earnings of the apprentice. We must keep in focus the fact that an apprentice becomes a long term taxpayer and in fact pays income tax on the wages he/she earns during the period of apprenticeship.

We are opposed to the loans model of funding for apprenticeship students. In the loans model, the individual apprentice will be left to determine the return on their investment in apprenticeship and this will create an incentive for apprenticeship candidates to enrol only in high paying trades. We don't want to see individuals deterred from becoming apprentices because of the possibility of being saddled with large debts. As the in-school training period is a requirement of the apprenticeship, apprentices are at work while in-school and should be maintained on salary, supported by additional funds from governments and/or employers.

Whatever funding model is instituted, government should pay the major portion of the cost, and industry should pay the rest through increased taxes. The government must examine using the tax system to increase the contribution of employers to the cost of training the workforce.

Portability of apprenticeships

We need to improve cross-accreditation opportunities and procedures, and the portability of schooling and work experience between programs and institutions within Canada. This can best be done through the standardization of training, evaluation, and ensuring that delivery models actually deliver quality education. The community colleges are already involved in programs that will offer portability of apprenticeship skills into technology through mechanisms such as Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR). Community colleges can ensure these linkages are provided in a manner that promotes consistency and the control of quality.

Setting the record straight

There are some people within the labour movement in Canada who believe that the delivery of entry-level pre-apprenticeships, pre-employment and apprenticeship training in community colleges has no genesis but rather just grew like Topsy. Nothing could be further from the truth. **How and why this industrial training was established and the method of delivery being done at public institutions was the result of deliberate and detailed discussions between the partners for the development of a skilled industrial workforce for a post-war Canada.** The partners in

those discussions included the Federal and Provincial Governments, labour and management across the country.

Pre-World War II apprenticeship

Apprenticeship in various skilled trades have been around for a long time in Canada and the responsibility for training basically fell to employers. The set of hands of the apprentices absorbing the skills of the trade as best they could, perhaps with or without guidance from other journey persons who worked for the same employer, was how apprentices were trained. Technical training, as it was then, was delivered to apprentices through night school programs, attendance at school on Saturdays or not at all. In those days, the level of consistency of training, the skills development and quality of the journey person did not always hit the mark sought at the end of the apprenticeship program.

In those days, provincial governments were marginally involved in overseeing the apprenticeship system with the result that the system was not as strong as it might have been.

Training programs initiated for a specific purpose

Following the experience of World War II, a war production skilled workforce was trained through a frantic on-the-job in-plant training program. Through the efforts of both labour and management working with C.D. Howe, training programs were initiated throughout Canadian industry to meet the demands for materiel for the war effort and Canadian industry. The programs were necessary in the absence of many skilled workers who had left the industrial sector short of skills because they had gone overseas to fight with the Allied Forces.

A strong skilled workforce

This experience of intensive training, albeit with a narrower focus than a full apprenticeship program, produced the skilled workforce needed to produce the goods to win the war. A large portion of that quickly developed workforce were women, many of whom stayed in the skilled industrial workforce for at least a couple of years after the end of the war. Many returning veterans did not go back into the trades they left when they joined the armed forces, but opted to go to university under the educational opportunities extended to veterans. Coupled with retirements and

Post-war shortage of skilled workers

with the withdrawal of women skilled workers from the industrial sectors (the reason for which will not be dealt with here), the Federal Government recognized, as the country was entering the 1950s, that it had a problem with an insufficient skilled workforce that would allow Canada to participate at the proper rate in the industrial expansion following World War II.

A national training initiative

The federal Government thus began discussions with provincial governments. During those discussions in which both labour and business in each of the provinces were included, the national training initiative was begun. The outcome of those initiatives was a Federal/Provincial cost sharing agreement for training and the establishment of a number of Vocational Schools operated by each **province which put in place a public delivery system for technical training in skilled trades**. Each province committed to improve its apprenticeship legislation, to look at national standards and provide for the content of training delivered by Provincial Vocational Schools through a trade advisory committee structure for input into training from industry and both business and labour.

Provincial Vocational Schools

The Vocational Schools provided pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship training which met the content of the course outlines established by trade advisory committees for each of the trades. During the late 1950s and the 1960s, Provincial Vocational Schools trained apprentices to a very high standard with a high level of acceptance by industry and labour with a large population of indentured apprenticeships. These were the halcyon days for trades training, apprentice indentureships and in meeting the needs of the industrial sector for skilled workers.

High standard and high level of acceptance by industry

A very successful model

The model of the joint venture Provincial Vocational Schools was so successful that industries not training skilled workers using the traditional apprenticeship model wanted access. Soon after, pre-employment programs for skill areas in the industrial sector that needed training requirements started to emerge. Content of those programs were developed in a similar way to that of the content of apprenticeship programs – that is through the advisory committee structure.

Basic training and skills development

For those who wanted to get into structured entry training and indentured as apprentices, but did not meet the entry requirements for trades and skilled work because of their experience in the secondary school system, could enroll in basic training and skills development (BTSD), which were preparatory programs that very quickly became part of the functions of the Provincial Vocational School system.

A misconception

The argument now being put forward by some organizations in the labour movement is that apprenticeship training was only on loan to Vocational Schools from industry and the Unions that worked in those industries. Now, it seems that they want it back from public institutions along with, of course, the funds to support that training.

No grounds to argue

This is a fallacious, shallow and specious argument which thinly veils a grab at funding by some Unions in their attempt to take over training that, in the face of continual erosion of support and funding, has been delivered by public institutions.

National training initiatives were needed to fill a void in training and apprenticeship programs

The facts of the matter are that prior to the national training initiatives taken by the federal Government in the early 1950s and the federal/provincial agreements, the support through E.I. for apprenticeship and entry-level training and the delivery of that training through public institutions, the technical training portion of apprenticeship was hit and miss at best when left in the hands of the on-the-job trainers - be they employers or the Unions.

Publicly funded institutions have been “delivering the goods”

The publicly funded Vocational School infrastructure was set up to “deliver the goods” for industrial training because the training and development of a skilled workforce was not being done. The delivery of training was never, “a lend-lease” proposition nor the property of any organization. It belongs to the Nation and is best delivered through properly funded public institutions across the country. It is also imperative that a positive supportive interface between the partners be encouraged as the way to enhance training in the industrial sector.

Trade Unions gave Vocational Schools full support

To further spike the argument by some Unions who argue that apprenticeship training by public colleges was some sort of “lend-lease” arrangement, and that now it should be handed back, we have to remember that those Unions are the same ones who were the major supporters of the National training initiatives and the establishment of publicly funded regional Vocational Schools back in the 1950s. They supported them because of standards, curriculum development and the economies of scale of the training delivery model – that is a full class of pre-apprentices or apprentices even though the students may have been indentured to different Unions or employers.

The fact that regional Vocational Schools became the nucleus of regional colleges in the early 1970s should also not be forgotten, just as the fact that the delivery of entry-level and apprenticeship in-school training has always been done since the mid-1950s by the public education sector.

Recommendations

The National Union must resist the attack on the public system which was built in cooperation with employers and Unions. NUPGE needs to turn back the arguments that somehow the public system hasn’t delivered the goods. It should be argued at every level including the Executive Council of the CLC that the grab for training and the dollars to do it is little more than a co-optation of members of the house of labour by the federal Government and like minded provincial governments, as they seek to abrogate their responsibilities for the development of a skilled industrial workforce and the resulting destruction of the public post-secondary system.

With regards to apprenticeship programs in Canada, it is the position of the **National Union of Public and General Employees** that:

- The federal and provincial governments should promote youth / school / college work apprenticeships as well as adult apprenticeships;
- The federal and provincial governments should institute a refundable training tax on employer payrolls;

- The federal government should be a significant financial investor in apprenticeships. The return on the investment with regards to personal income taxes paid by an apprentice worker who receives journey person status is substantial;
- Provincial governments also have to make a significant investment in apprenticeship programs. They are constitutionally responsible for education, and they too get a substantial return in increased personal income and sales taxes;
- Apprenticeships should not be funded by tuition fees on apprentices or annual licensing fees for journey persons;
- Community colleges must remain the deliverers of 'in-school' apprenticeship training in order to maintain high standards; and
- Apprentices ought to be maintained on salary while at school, as the work is part of the contract of indentureship.