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Labour Welfare in Canada: An Examination of Occupational Assistance

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This article explores labour welfare in Canada across three distinct periods of occupational assistance: welfare capitalism that began with the Industrial Revolution and persisted through the depression of the 1930s; occupational alcoholism programming that emerged during World War II and the typically unreported domestic labour strife of the 1940s, lasting through the postwar economic boom into the 1960s; and the employee assistance programming era with the introduction of the broad-brush approach to workplace-based assistance that also witnessed organised labour in Canada provide fundamental supports to workers that were originally introduced by workplace owners during the welfare capitalism period, though now to benefit workers rather than to control them. Since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution and into the new information and technological era of work, organised labour has had a distinct role in shaping and providing services to enhance worker and community wellness in Canada.

KEYWORDS Canada, labour welfare, occupational assistance, welfare capitalism

The true history of a nation can never be known unless we know about the work lives of the labouring population . . . the quality of the lives of these working men and women are the primary measure of the success of a democratic society.

Eli Ginzberg and Hyman Berman
The American Worker in the 20th Century

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> Unions have traditionally taken care of their own members not only by negotiating protection clauses in collective agreements, but they have assisted members with problems that may or may not have arisen out of the workplace.
>
> Dick Martin, Vice President, Canadian Labour Congress, 1986

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ORGANISED LABOUR IN CANADA

The emergence of Canada's industrial era in the 1800s, when the nation was still a colony of England, was premised upon what Canada remains known for in the 21st century: natural resources. In the 19th century it was water, wood, fishery, and fur that would lead to the development of industrial centres primarily along the Canada/United States border. Thus, in terms of its early labour history, Canada was tied to two nations: one through sovereignty, one through geography.

The era of welfare capitalism in Canada saw working conditions much like the rest of the industrialising world: long hours, unsafe and hazardous worksites, and minimal workers rights; quitting a job could be construed as a criminal offense for a worker, punishable by imprisonment under the Master and Servant Act. It was also ostensibly illegal to form a geographically broad-based union until 1872, 5 years after the Canadian confederation. Canada's first Prime Minister, Sir John A. MacDonald, was central in this process of change, though part of the incentive was to undermine the platform of his political opposition. Under MacDonald's leadership, Canada enacted two significant pieces of labour legislation: a Trade Unions Act and a Criminal Law Amendment Act (1872) modeled on the British Acts of the previous year. Led by British, Scottish, Irish, and American immigrants who brought their own experience of unions to Canada, the country's first substantive labour organisation, the Canadian Labour Union (CLU), was created in 1873. Among the CLU's goals were shorter working hours, opposition to convict labour and to employment of children younger than age 10, free public education, direct labour representation in Parliament, and the right to vote. By the time of the organisation's dissolution in 1878 (due to global economic issues) the CLU had witnessed the enactment of legislation allowing employees to recover lost wages, the right to picket, and easement of some of the clauses of the restrictive Master and Servant Act (Canadian Labour Congress, 2005; Heron, 1994).

By the 1880s, the economy was recovering, in large part due to the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway, and so was union membership, with 240 locals in Canada in operation by 1890. A second contributing factor for the growth of labour organisations was the appearance of the Knights of Labour, an American labour association. The Knights were voracious labour organisers and during their tenure helped form more than 300 union locals

across Canada. However, even with increasing membership, the limitations of unions were evident in Canada as subsequent governments eroded their powers, limiting the right to strike, picket, and boycott, while employers were allowed to fire and blacklist union members and to hire strikebreakers, something that continued to occur well into the 20th century in some parts of Canada. During the early 1900s, police, the military, and private security forces were regularly used to intervene in legal strikes. The predecessor of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police actually attacked workers in Winnipeg, Manitoba, during the general strike of 1919, killing one protester. It would take nearly 30 years for the Canadian labour movement to fully recover from this substantive set back (Avery, 1979; Canadian Labour Congress, 2005; Heron, 1998).

In was not until 1944 that Canadian unionists achieved what American unions had earned nearly a decade earlier under their national labour relations (Wagner) act. However, this still occurred only after numerous clashes between labour and management across Canada, many of which were violent, a final wildcat strike of steelworkers early in 1943, and the dramatic growth of support for the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), forerunner of the New Democratic Party of Canada, before the issue was resolved. Canadian workers finally became entitled to the right to choose a union, to bargain collectively, and to grieve unfair labour practices. This victory was further strengthened through the development of the Rand Formula (union check-off) in 1946. After a strike between the Ford Motor Company of Canada and the United Auto Workers, based in Windsor, Ontario, Mr. Justice Ivan Rand of the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that any union member who benefited from union negotiations would automatically have a portion of his or her salary deducted by the employer and provided to the union. The Rand Formula cemented the financial security of unions, and, along with the imminent post-war boom, set the stage for the dramatic growth of Canadian labour (Canadian Encyclopaedia, 2007; Canadian Labour Congress, 2005).

Union membership steadily grew in terms of absolute number and percentage of the workforce throughout the 20th century, peaking in 1986, when more than one-third of Canadian workers belonged to a labour organisation (Table 1). Increases were temporarily stagnant from 1958 to 1964 until membership again began to increase due to the unionization of public sector government workers at the municipal, provincial, and federal levels. Organization of these sectors also brought a major influx of women into the Canadian labour movement. Prior to becoming more formally organised, women working for pay in Canada faced major inequities in income and working conditions.

Table 1 also indicates the postindustrial era's impact on organised labour. Despite the nation's continued economic growth, and the fact that there were nearly four and one half million union members in 2006, this now represented only one-fourth of all Canadian workers, a decrease of

TABLE 1 Union Membership in Canada (1911–2007)

Year	Canadian population	Union membership	% of workforce
1911	7,206,643	133,000	n.r.
1921	8,787,949	313,000	16.0
1931	10,376,786	311,000	15.3
1941	11,506,655	462,000	18.0
1951	14,009,429	1,029,000	28.4
1956	16,080,791	1,352,000	33.3
1961	18,238,247	1,447,000	31.6
1966	20,014,880	1,736,000	30.7
1971	21,568,310	2,211,000	33.6
1976	22,992,600	2,884,000	32.0
1981	24,343,180	3,487,000	32.5
1986	25,309,330	3,730,000	34.1
1991	27,296,855	4,068,000	28.4
1996	28,846,760	4,033,000	27.2
2001	30,007,095	4,111,000	25.9
2006	31,612,897	4,441,000	25.6
2007	32,777,300	4,480,020	25.5

Note: n.r. = not reported.

Sources: Chang and Sorrentio, 1991; Statistics Canada, 2006a, 2006b, 2007.

26.1% in two decades. Thus, though we discuss the significant impact organised labour has had on the wellness of Canadian workers here, and thus upon the well-being of the entire country, it must be underscored that the vast majority of those who labour in Canada at best indirectly benefit from these initiatives and at worst not at all. However, it should also be noted that the rate of union membership in Canada remains relatively high compared to the rate in the United States which was only 12.1% in 2007 and 12.4% in 2008.

MODERN CANADA

Today, Canada is a major industrialized nation with a population of over thirty-three million people, approximately one tenth that of the United States. Formally coming together in 1867, the country is a parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy comprising 10 provinces and three territories spread over the second largest country in land mass in the world. With recent immigration representing nearly three fourths of the labour growth in Canada, it is one of the most racially and ethnically diverse countries in the Western world (Phillips, 2005). Canada has an export-based economy with 75% of its industry located on what is called the Windsor–Montreal corridor, running along the United States' northern border. With a large agricultural, manufacturing, oil, mining, and services sector, Canada is an advanced industrialized country, one of the world's wealthier nations.

WELFARE CAPITALISM: THE BEGINNINGS OF LABOUR WELFARE IN CANADA

At the onset of the Industrial Revolution, little value was attributed to workers. Employees were viewed as expendable and easily replaceable and were merely another part of the industrial machine. However, the expansion of industry in the late 1800s in Canada led to an increasing number of immigrants and women entering the paid labour force. This changing face of the workforce was compounded by increases in labour unrest, with some employers responding by hiring private police forces and by directing violence against striking workers. A vastly different response by other employers, however, was the development of industrial welfare initiatives. Welfare capitalism was a 19th- and early-20th-century North American employer mechanism whose motive was to obtain worker loyalty by meeting a smattering of their basic needs (Brandes, 1976).

Although having humanitarian overtones, the underlying motivation was to create a healthy, hard-working, orderly, productive nonunionized workforce that would not question management initiatives, decisions, or values. Paternalism was an intrinsic element of welfare capitalism. Owners viewed their acts as a means to produce a contented and subdued labour force. Management would meet all their needs, and thus workers would have no necessity for organizing or for turning to unions to assist in fulfilling their needs (Googins & Godfrey, 1987; Popple, 1981; Scheinberg, 1986).

One major tool of welfare capitalism in the mid 19th century was the provision of housing for workers (Brandes, 1976). The problem of housing workers was the direct result of industrialization as major housing inadequacies occurred for the first time in North America with the shift of labour populations from villages to towns. The lack of suitable lands in the vicinity of factories and an insufficient availability of construction materials also contributed to housing shortages. In response, some companies, themselves, began supplying housing to ensure and maintain an adequate workforce to carry out production (Robinson, 1962). This fostered a culture of dependence among workers with many owners presuming that their employees should be thankful to be living in company towns that provided so much in return only for their labour (Allen, 1966; McGilly, 1985). Despite the resentment these attempts at social engineering fostered among workers, paternalism and welfare capitalism were considered by numerous 19th century businessmen to be a "moral responsibility, protecting society while furthering business" (Garner, 1984, p. 19).

Other prominent welfare capitalism programmes included the establishment of lunchrooms, where meals could be eaten away from where the work was preformed, shower facilities with running water, and the infamous company store. However, some owners went further and established medical

clinics staffed by company paid nurses and physicians. Some programmes moved beyond meeting only basic needs by providing recreation facilities, adult education programmes, schools for the children of workers, and community libraries (Googins & Godfrey, 1987; McGilly, 1985).

However, the underlying motivation behind these management initiatives did not go unchallenged by labour, and a variety of organisations arose in direct response. In the 19th century, Friendly Societies began springing up in England to assist the working class to cope with adverse industrial living conditions and the idea migrated to Canada, with workers looking for better conditions promised in the developing colony. Friendly Societies arose as a result of the stresses of industrialism emerging from the demise of the guild system during a period when unions were still considered to be illegal conspiracies in restraint of free trade (Katz & Bender, 1976). Friendly Societies promoted thrift and mutual aid and were an attempt by workers to meet their social and convivial needs and to insure against the hazards of sickness and death because employers offered inconsequential, if any, long-term economic security. Friendly Societies increased in numbers, size, and prominence with increases in industrialization and the alienation it brought (Gosden, 1973). However, by the end of the 19th century there was a growing realization that these established personal and voluntary mutual assistance efforts were not adequate to prevent large numbers of injured workers and their families from becoming poverty stricken (Rimlinger, 1983).

Although Friendly Societies did not take as great a foothold in Canada as in Britain, other forms of economic mutual aid did arise during the 1800s, including cooperative leagues and the first industrial trade union, the Knights of Labour. The foundation of the Knights was primarily motivated by economic self-help principles (Romeder, 1990). However, the Knights (and other trade unions) moved beyond merely meeting physical needs to assisting European immigrants to Canada in learning the language and customs of their new homeland, as well as providing moral, social, and instrumental supports (Remine, Rice, & Ross, 1984; Van Den Bergh, 1991). Several labour associations, particularly the Knights of Labour, also acted to discourage excessive drinking by workers. Many labour leaders felt inebriated workers were too easily made pawns by owners who would regularly supply cheap liquor instead of adequate wages, benefits, and working conditions (Kealey & Palmer, 1982).

Welfare capitalism did meet basic workers' needs, but more so, those of employers. It was therefore challenged by labour groups who focused on wages and working conditions as imperatives to counter the programmes provided by employers. Welfare capitalism was a movement motivated by employer self-interest and meant to meet the political and material needs of owners. Basic biological requirements of workers were met, but only to further the higher needs of owners. There was little, if any, potential for workers to shape their environment because the primary motive of

employers in providing for basic worker needs was to nullify the need for any collective social action. It created a coercive, autocratic, and feudal organisational environment, perpetuating a system of labour–management relations where the distribution of power and reward was unequal. During this period, the motivation for occupational programme development was primarily to assist in producing a docile, submissive workforce by providing a few rudimentary human needs.

OCCUPATIONAL ALCOHOLISM PROGRAMMING: LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR CONTEMPORARY LABOUR WELFARE

In 1935, as the last vestiges of welfare capitalism were winding down, the emergence of the inaugural and archetypical contemporary self-help group of the 20th century, Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), was occurring. On the cusp of another major transformation of the workforce came the emergence of a group that itself would alter many facets of our society and whose philosophy of mutuality, peer support, and enlightenment aligned with the goals and motives of a strengthening labour movement in Canada.

Another significant factor influencing labour welfare and occupational assistance programming during this era was the overwhelming emphasis by labour on business unionism, an import from the United States during the late 1930s, the closing days of the Great Depression. Organized labour in Canada had a tradition of social involvement, particularly through its association with the social gospel movement, and the application of Christian principles to counteract the collective ills of industrial life. One reason welfare capitalism was not as dominant in Canada as in the United States during the early 1900s was the greater provision of social benefits by organised labour to its membership in Canada and the strength of the social gospel movement across the country. However, the initial disempowerment of unions began in Canada with the failure of the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike. As noted earlier in Table 1, labour unions were further weakened by the loss of momentum in the social gospel movement and were nearly fatally disabled by the impact in the 1930s of the Great Depression (R. Allen, 1971). In the place of social activism, Gomperism, named after President Samuel Gompers of the American Federation of Labour, migrated to Canada and became a dominant theme within the Canadian labour movement. The exclusive mandate under Gompers was the acquisition of enhanced financial benefits and working conditions; this "pay packet and lunch pail" philosophy temporarily superseded the broader Canadian labour goals of social justice and equality, greatly negating labour's role in providing occupational assistance to its membership (Kerans, Dorver, & Williams, 1988; Robin, 1968).

With the end of the 1930s and the onset of World War II, however, management's greatest asset was vastly diminished. No longer was there

an abundant supply of surplus labour. Those who were considered unemployable 5 years earlier were now in great demand. Individuals who had previously been labeled as marginal employees were suddenly essential to the wartime workforce. With an additional influx of new labour, as during the late 1800s, new problems surfaced. The most readily identifiable dilemma was the alcohol-dependent employee. These former outcasts were now needed (if not necessarily wanted) in the workplace (Corneil, 1984; Trice & Sonnenstuhl, 1985).

During World War II, members of AA in the United States met with prominent corporate leaders to promote AA in the workplace. Medical directors of large organisations who did not have any knowledge of alcoholism also turned to AA members for assistance because of their own inability to effectively intervene with employees who had problems with their use of alcohol (Dunkin, 1982; Scanlon, 1986; Trice & Sonnenstuhl, 1988). Employees active in AA not only intervened with other alcoholic employees but also helped to establish on-site and external, community-based groups. As this method of prescribed workplace-based intervention became more formalised and widespread it became referred to as Occupational Alcoholism Programming (OAP). Although AA members were almost always also members of labour, OAP was initiated and administered primarily through personnel departments and was not affiliated with the unions to which the members belonged.

During the 1940s in Canada, a greater number of formalised community services began and were operated by charities with monies commonly gathered through public collection days. These became known as "tag days" for a worker would receive a tag to pin on his coat indicating that he had made a contribution to the cause. A major focus of many tag days were plant gate collections because unionized workers made better wages and had greater job security than the majority of the Canadian workforce. Union members and unions themselves contributed significant amounts in support of a broad range of social and health causes; however, the giving became onerous over time, with more and more organisations coming forward to collect money in this manner. To replace the nearly weekly collections that occurred at the gates of many plants, unions endorsed the idea of one federated campaign, to give once to support a wide range of needed services to assist not only union members but the entire community. This was the beginning of the Community Fund and Red Feather campaigns that would ultimately become the United Way. Federated fund-raising organisations first began in Canada in Toronto, Ontario, and Vancouver, British Columbia, following the model developed in the United States. A key component of the organised fund-raising campaigns was a dedicated labour liaison staff person who was also affiliated with the local labour council and provincial labour federation. Initially, these staff positions were designed to support fund-raising campaigns in unionized workplaces, with provision of adjunct

services to unions and union members as a secondary function. However, slowly the need for specific services for union members was acknowledged and became more prominent. To promote and explain labour's participation in the United Way, a new bulletin was published in Toronto, "Labour Reports," and a course was developed to educate trade union members about the work of the agencies their donations were supporting, and how best to make use of the services (Toronto Labour Community Services, 2007).

However, labour's contribution to meeting the needs of workers during this phase of the development of occupational assistance was still very much locked into a Gomperism-driven philosophy. Unions continued to primarily focus their efforts upon enhancing basic members' needs through the collective bargaining process. Unions typically were neither invited by management to assist in developing OAPs, nor did organised labour actively lobby to be part of the process. This fact further allowed the entrenchment of workplace intervention as being solely a role for supervisors and managers much to the chagrin of segments of the rank and file and more radical labour locals. They asserted that OAPs were nothing more than witch hunts to detect and discharge union members under the guise of addressing alcohol-related problems (Corneil, 1984; Romeder, 1990).

THE EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE ERA: GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF LABOUR WELFARE IN CANADA

In the United States, Employee Assistance Programming became institutionalised through the passing of the 1970 Federal Comprehensive Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism Prevention, Treatment and Rehabilitation Act under the leadership of Senator Harold Hughes, former governor of Iowa and AA member. Among the outcomes of the "Hughes Act" was the creation of the National Institute on Alcoholism and Alcohol Abuse (NIAAA) (Corneil, 1984; Shain, 1978). The NIAAA provided start-up grant funding with money to hire occupational consultants whose mandate was to help work organisations develop OAPs. Simultaneously, other federal government departments and the U.S. military were told to introduce similar programming. However, the occupational consultants were not exclusively trained in addiction, and as a result many of these initial programmes moved beyond merely supporting employees with alcohol and other drug issues to looking at a broader range of personal issues that affected work performance (Lotterhos, 1975; Steele, 1989; Thomlison, 1983).

American James Wrich is credited with first coining the term *Employee Assistance Program* (EAP) in the course of his work at Hazelden in Minnesota. It would be a new approach to problem finding and resolution in the workplace (Steele, 1989). Wrich (1980) emphasized the need for labour and management to work conjointly in developing a formal

programme policy to implement this new "broad-brush" approach. He advocated for the institutionalization of systematic and coordinated procedures, including educating and training all individuals involved in assisting employees with personal problems that affected their ability to work. A key dimension in the transition from OAPs to EAPs was increasing recognition of the importance of a cooperative administrative process, the joint labour–management committee, a mechanism already established and hence legislated in the health and safety field. Wrich stated that programmes should no longer be unilaterally initiated by management, even if management were paying for the service. Rather, representatives of various sectors of the workplace should come together to decide what should be done to benefit the entire workforce. Although designing and implementing a programme took much longer using this collabourative process, the resulting programme had a greater propensity to take into consideration the needs of employees (Eisenbarth, Friesen, & Csiernik, 1993; Fogarty, 1994; Wrich, 1980).

However, segments of labour remained skeptical of the involvement of management in the process of occupational assistance programme development, and as such, several Canadian unions affiliated with larger American international unions, such as the United Steelworkers of America (USWA), International Brotherhood of Electricians (IBEW), and United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW-brewery local). They initiated EAPs independently without the involvement of management. Using AA as a model, labour also developed its own unique delivery mechanism of helping within the workplace, which they named Union Counselling. The concept of Union Counselling originally had been proposed in 1942 by the Labour Division of the War Production Board of the American Federation of Labour - Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) in the United States; however, it was not until 1973 that the first Union Counsellor programme was established in Canada in Windsor, Ontario. In 1988, Union Counselling became a formally ratified joint initiative between the Canadian Labour Congress and the United Way, with new local agreements being confirmed well into the 1990s in various parts of the country (Canadian Labour Congress, 1979, 2007; Miller & Metz, 1991; Potter, 2007). The objective of this programme was and continues to be to develop a strong network of labour activists who are trained by labour representatives, working for the United Way, as part of the United Way's ongoing cooperative, coordinated effort with organised labour.

The programme is promoted as a prevention initiative. Union counsellors are trained to help members identify and to overcome personal problems by referring them to appropriate, non-management-sponsored helping resources in the community. Despite the name, union counsellors do not counsel workers; rather, they act exclusively as listeners and referral resources as they are trained in communication skills, individual and group helping techniques, advocacy, and referral, and are taught to utilize the spectrum of community-based voluntary social services available to persons in

need, including mutual aid/self-help resources. Union Counselling was envisioned as a safe harbor from the actual (or perceived) zero tolerance policies of management regarding personal problems in the workplace. Unionized employees may voluntarily seek out the assistance of a union counsellor at any phase of problem formation and thus have no need to contact either human resources or the medical department, as occurred with OAPs. Instead, using a union counsellor, an employee remains anonymous to management. Union Counselling is a relationship between peers, as organised labour expects that more of a bond and trust exists between fellow workers, who often call one another "brothers" and "sisters," than exists between workers and management. Union counsellors also play a role in identifying gaps in community services and as advocates with respect to important workplace issues that affect their fellow members. As well, union counsellors assist union officers to address root causes of problems in the workplace and the community (Canadian Labour Congress, 2006; Kerans et al., 1988; Potter, 2007).

The Canadian Autoworkers (CAW) were part of United Auto Workers (UAW) that did not belong to the AFL-CIO when the Union Counselling programme was initiated. As a result, the UAW (and subsequently the CAW) developed its own programme similar to Union Counselling, though with an exclusive focus upon alcohol and other psychoactive substances of abuse, again acknowledging the ties of labour to earlier AA-sponsored initiatives in the workplace. The CAW also negotiated with Ford, Chrysler, and General Motors in Canada to have paid substance abuse representatives physically located in large plants as part of their collective agreements with CAW, rather than relying only upon volunteers. Labour substance abuse staff are either appointed by the union or elected by the membership. They are available to assist fellow union members with any drug- or alcohol-related problem they may have, and motivation to become a substance abuse staff person frequently arises from personal experience with (and recovery from) substance dependency. Substance abuse staff also tend to have close ties to a variety of 12-step self-help groups, and in larger plants representatives have their own offices, on-site, where self-help meetings are commonly held (Canadian Auto Workers, 2001).

A parallel process was developed by some employer organisations, including MacMillan Bloedel, the Ontario Ministry of Corrections, and the Canadian federal government, in which the term *referral agent* was used instead of *union counsellor* because the peer supports were developed to aid any worker, even if the worker belonged to management (Revenue Canada, 1991; Torjman, 1981; Van Halm, 1988). The responsibilities of referral agents are nearly identical to those of union counsellors except that referral agents can come from any strata of an organisation's hierarchy; and, in fact, different levels of employees are encouraged to participate. This more generic name, and the association with the broad-brush concept of

EAP, also has led some large unions to adopt the title *referral agent* rather than *union counsellor* with some United Way agencies to provide Employee Assistance training rather than union counsellor training (Canadian Union of Public Employees, 1989; Torjman, 1981; United Way of London and Middlesex, 2007). During the Employee Assistance era, labour in Canada expanded its focus on assistance to the workforce well beyond salaries and benefits, supporting secondary prevention when aiding union brothers and sisters with personal difficulties through programmes such as Union Counselling, or participating in joint labour–management advisory committees. Canadian labour welfare initiatives also have begun to significantly move into providing services that had originally been offered to workers as a means of social control during the welfare capitalism period but now are provided to authentically improve the lives of its members. Beginning in the 1970s, several major Canadian unions (such as the CAW) began providing paid educational leave for members. The CAW (2007b) built its own training facility, beyond the auspices of a traditional union hall, to further facilitate this process, offering courses ranging from contract negotiation to alcohol and drug counsellor certification. The United Food and Commercial Workers (2007), along with many other unions, began offering educational grants and scholarships to members and members' children (Hospital Employees Union, 2006; International Longshore and Warehouse Union Canada, 2007; Retail Wholesale and Department Store Union of Canada, 2007; United Steel Workers Local 1–2171, 2007). However, even more fundamental initiatives have been promoted as well, including active literacy campaigns for workers (Alberta Federation of Labour, 2007; United Steel Workers, 2007), some of which cite the ground-breaking work of the Knights of Labour in this endeavor (Canadian Union of Public Employees, 2006).

A significant initiative promoted by a few welfare capitalists a century ago was the creation of company housing. Although the provision of housing was primarily a means of controlling the early industrial workforce, current Canadian labour welfare initiatives have included active political campaigns advocating shelter as a fundamental human right. Such new enterprises include advocating for the development of a national housing policy, which Canada still does not have in the 21st century, to active participation in the creation of social housing (Canadian Auto Workers, 2007c). The Canadian Labour Congress spearheaded the development of co-operative housing in Canada, in conjunction with the Co-operative Union of Canada and the Canadian Union of Students, by establishing the Co-operative Housing Foundation of Canada. In 1973, an amendment to the National Housing Act allowed for the creation of Canada's first co-op housing programme. The federal government eventually was joined in the venture by several provincial partners, the most prominent being British Columbia and Ontario. This amendment was the result of the direct influence of the federal New Democratic Party, which 40 years earlier had been instrumental in creating

legislation legitimizing labour unions in the country. Until funding for new units was eliminated in 1996, more than 82,000 units were built, many spearheaded by local unions, providing affordable, self-managed housing for nearly 250,000 people. The additional distinction of co-operative housing was that each project was not merely a collection of individual units but rather a collective that allowed co-op members to build communities that they themselves managed and that promote participatory decision making (British Columbia Institute for Co-operative Studies, 2007; Hulchanski, 2007; UNESCO, 2007).

Canadian labour groups have always had political action as part of their mandate beginning with the reformation of provincial labour laws. Supporting a political party that viewed working men and women (along with the disadvantaged and marginalized in society) as their primary constituency, Canadian unions are known for supporting progressive social policies (National Union of Public and General Employees 2007a, 2007b). Among the most notable recent social policy initiatives lobbied for by labour in Canada have been calls for action regarding violence against women (International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, 2007). In their brief, the CAW (2000) stated that part of the responsibility for violence against women belonged to the government when it chose to remove funding for second-stage shelters, underfunded emergency women's shelters, eliminated affordable housing options, and through the drastic reduction of social assistance and unemployment insurance benefits. The United Steel Workers (2004) developed a guide for its membership on violence prevention that included a focus on violence in the family and in the workplace, including a discussion of physical and sexual harassment between members.

Likewise, organised labour in Canada has openly advocated for affirmative action for First Nations peoples and workers of colour. Unions have supported community development initiatives such as national and regional aboriginal/workers of colour conferences, have worked with caucuses from these communities to support indigenous activism, and have ensured that First Nations and other workers of colour become full participants in decision-making structures through affirmative action positions on labour bodies (Canadian Auto Workers, 2007a). Similarly, many national and local unions have taken firm stands on the importance of human rights within the workplace, across Canada and worldwide, with larger unions having specific human rights departments and dedicated staff (Canadian Union of Public Employees, 2007; United Food and Commercial Workers, 2007).

CONCLUSION

Labour unions have been instrumental in making Canada the prosperous nation that it is today, not only through the provision of its labour but also

through its social activism. Although unions currently represent only one fourth of the working population, the initiatives of organised labour have cascaded from the workplace into the community to create broader wellness for all Canadians. During each of Canada's three stages of occupational assistance programme development, distinctive societal influences have motivated labour organisations and individual union members to act to improve workplace life. There has been ongoing conflict between the interests of workers and of capital, and this historically antagonistic interaction could be characterized as profit versus people, productivity versus humanitarianism, organisational needs versus personal betterment. In response, the union movement has produced its own mechanisms for occupational assistance programming and has moved beyond that to advocating not only for its own members, but also for those who are unorganised and unprotected, nationally and internationally. The history of industrialized work and of occupational assistance has reflected changes in the employer–employee relationship, or, as Shain, Suurvali, and Boutlier (1986) categorized it, the master–servant relationship, which ironically was the title of Canada's original labour legislation. For most workers to earn a living in a formally structured industrial enterprise they originally had to agree to give up the rights and privileges of citizenship: free speech, free association, and control of collective policy (Greenberg, 1986). Unions emerged because of this fact and will continue to be necessary because of this reality in a postindustrial society. However, beyond a basic "pay packet" philosophy labour also has provided a wealth of services and supports in assisting not only workers but also communities in Canada as well.

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